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I

WHEN Walter Garnet, in his rooms at Stafford College, Oxford, learned from the shouting of an uproarious friend in the quad that he had got his First in Greats, he threw down the book he had been reading, and leaned out of the window, to be greeted by a torrent of congratulation to which he replied, "Thanks very much!"

"I never saw such an old slug!" said his breathless friend. "Aren't you going to *do* anything?"

"Come up and see!" said Garnet.

Tommy Hobday clattered up the narrow wooden stairs. The room, a pleasant little panelled place, was half dismantled. On the table was a pile of books and a smaller pile of notebooks and papers.

"Hullo," said Tommy, "I didn't know you were going to clear out so quick."

"Yes, I am off to-morrow. I shall just come back to take my degree."

"I don't believe you are a bit pleased!"

"Yes, I am—very much. At least I should have been furious if I hadn't got my First."

"Well, you are the coolest fish! I should have been all over the place by now, if I had been you. But what are we going to do?"

"Well, I'll give you a dinner somewhere to-night if you will order it and get the men."

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"Won't I just! Do you run to champagne?" asked Tommy.

"Yes, anything you like."

"Anyone in particular?"

"Oh, Bim and Menzies and any of the old lot, not more than eight beside ourselves."

The irrepressible Tommy looked at him. "What's the matter with you, Walter? You seem to have begun practising to be a Don already. *Whence this dejected mien?*" and Hobday burst into a few bars of an opera-bouffe.

"Why, 'at such a time as this,' as the Dean said in his sermon on Sunday, 'the mind naturally reverts to its spiritual horizon. What brave designs, what meagre fulfilment!'" and Walter rolled his eyes, and extended a sidelong forefinger at Tommy.

"Come, that's a little better. Now I'll go and rout the guys out. Any preference as to place?"

"Anywhere, anything, anybody—think of it as *your* party. Come to tea and tell me what you have arranged."

"All right. Walter, you are magnificent, and I shan't spare you—you may be sure of that." And the rapturous Tommy departed headlong.

Left to himself, Walter Garnet surveyed the scene. He was a tall, slim, active-looking young man, carelessly but effectively dressed. He was not noticeably handsome, but his little round head, perhaps a trifle too small for his body, with its soft brown curly hair, his clear complexion, his large grey-blue eyes, gave him at first sight a rather girlish air. He took up with his long firmly-knit hand a cigarette and lit it, blowing out a cloud of smoke. But now that he was alone a slight look of trouble gathered on his smooth forehead. He was vexed with himself for not having

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seemed livelier. "Damn it all!" he muttered irritably under his breath.

The fact was that he had been working very hard in his own way, though *why* he should work hard or want a First he hardly knew. It seemed to be something that lay deeper than his reason that drove him. And now he was feeling the reaction; a real touch of melancholy was upon him. He had been sleeping little of late, waking early and finding life unaccountably futile. He had tried to exorcise the devil by perpetual lawn-tennis and elaborate supper-parties; but life was without relish, and it bewildered him to find it more meaningless every day. He had meant to stay up till the finish, and have a delicious time; but a day or two before he had made up his mind to cut it all and go home. There at least no one would take any notice of his moods.

Walter's father was a small Squire in Shropshire, a pompous, good-natured man who lived very quietly; his mother was a simple, charitable, affectionate woman. He was deeply attached to them both, but he never attempted to share his ideas, of which he had a superabundance, with them. His father indulged him in every way; his mother looked anxiously after his health, and believed him to share her very preferential type of religion.

He had been at Winchester, where he had done well both in work and games. He had the sort of popularity which comes freely to pleasant, competent, modest and good-natured boys, but he had made no very intimate friends. He had gained a scholarship at Oxford, where he had worked hard and played games vigorously. But here again he had few intimates, and his ideas, which had crowded very insistently upon him of late, had been mostly shared with his tutor, a young man, Harry Norton, not many years older

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than himself, who had a keen intellect, abundant humour and a great sympathy with the dreams of immaturity. Norton was in fact Garnet's only intimate friend.

While he was musing, there came a knock at the door. A young man entered. "Come to see about the books, sir," he said. Walter indicated the table. He had been a considerable buyer of books; but now he had put together on the table all his school and College work-books, and a number of other volumes which he had bought out of curiosity, and thought he would not be likely to read again. The young man looked quickly through the heap, and made an offer of a few pounds, which was heedlessly accepted. Walter asked him if at the same time he would take away and destroy the notebooks and papers which represented all his hours of work at school and College. The young man agreed, and said they should be removed in the course of the afternoon.

The furniture was all to go. Walter had determined to take home only a bureau and a chair, a few books and pictures. Perhaps in a happier mood he would have kept more; but now it was a relief to him to get rid of everything.

As to Walter's ideas, he had come, like many men of his generation, very much under the influence of Pater. He did not find much nutriment in Pater's æsthetics, his tortured ecstasies, his resolute confections and concoctions of rapture; but he had been deeply smitten with the idea of bodily and mental temperance as interpreted in *Marius the Epicurean*, the control of bodily appetites, the clearness of spirit, the high disdain for anything vulgar or gross or materialistic. For commonplace comfort, acceptance of dull conventions, ordinary ambitions, matter-of-fact arrangements for easy living Walter had conceived a great disfavour. The instincts of the herd and the crowd seemed to him

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utterly tedious and even brutal. He felt that he must live a more intent life of his own in secrecy and without ostentation, and withdraw from the obvious and banal ideas of the people round him. Of course it was all self-centred, individualistic, fastidious, even ungenerous; but there was a purity and a radiance about his visions which seemed to him very real and sacred. The thought of making known these dreams to those about him appeared like a profanation; it was not that he desired to disentangle himself from the world altogether. But he wanted a wider range; he thought he might somewhere find men, even groups of men, to whom such thoughts as rose in his mind would be neither unusual nor extravagant. His idea was rather that he seemed to have discovered the shallowness and the grossness of view which lurked behind the good-humoured eagerness and jollity of his companions. He shuddered to think of the kind of men that they would unconsciously and contentedly become.

The only person he had ever ventured to hint these insistent cravings to had been Norton, but even he had rather laughed at him, and had seemed to suspect him of solemnity.

Presently he strolled out a little indecisively, passed through the quad and out again into a small, more ancient quad, went up a flight of stairs and knocked at a Gothic door. A voice within called a reply. Opening the door he entered a low-ceilinged room with deep window embrasures, almost lined with books. There was a table stacked with papers, containing a kind of bay or creek where the owner appeared to write. The room was shabbily but not uncomfortably furnished, though the confusion was great.

In a deep chair was lounging a tall, pale, ungainly, rather sickly-looking man, with hay-like hair showing already

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signs of baldness. He was smoking a pipe and reading a small volume. On seeing his visitor, Norton gave him a smile which irradiated his plain face, one of those large, cordial, personal smiles which win instant confidence by its transparent ingenuousness.

"Ah, Walter," he said, "so you have brought it off!"

"Yes!" said Walter.

"I never saw such a fellow as you for hoodwinking examiners," said Norton; "it's a kind of genius. But of course it isn't an education. You are a very ill-educated man, though you can put every scrap you possess in the shop-window."

"I quite agree it isn't an education," said Walter, "but the imparting of it provides a large number of people like yourself with very comfortable berths!"

"Don't be peevish, dear boy," said Norton. "I had expected a box of alabaster to be broken over my feet after all I have done for you."

"You!" said Walter, smiling. "Why, you have done your level best to prevent my getting a First. You have always tried to make me read things, when all they deserved was to be got up."

Norton shook his head mournfully. "Greats is really a very good education," he said, "if you want to learn to think."

"But to learn to think about one set of things doesn't enable you to think about other sets of things," said Walter. "It's the old fallacy. 'Euclid strengthens the logical faculties'—it doesn't. It only strengthens the logical faculties in dealing with geometry."

"You can't teach everyone everything," said Norton.

"No, but you can offer a larger choice of subjects. The real fact is that you belong to a Trades Union ring. You

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and your friends have nobbled education, and will only supply one kind, because it is too much trouble for you to acquaint yourselves with other subjects."

"That's a very shallow travesty of my position," said Norton; "besides, I can't think what other subjects you mean."

"Literature, art, music, religion—all the really vital forces. You can't bear anything that is alive, that is the truth! You are not interested in anything till it is dead and stiff and cold and rotten."

"My dear Walter!"

"Oh, yes—I apologize; I won't gas any more. There's something wrong with me. I can't take any interest in ordinary things just now, and when I do get interested I become offensive."

"You are overworked," said Norton. "I have seen it coming on for some time. You must knock off for a bit. What are you going to do? Is it any use my offering to come somewhere with you? I am at a loose end for a bit."

"That would be splendid. I am going home—they expect me to-morrow. I'm the only one, you know. Could I persuade you to come there with me? I have been wanting to ask you for a long time, but I was afraid you might be bored—my people are really quite harmless."

"I'll come like a shot, old man," said Norton. "I can be free this day week."

"I'm going off to-morrow," said Walter, "but will you come to us a week hence? The station is Pendridge. It's rather a pretty part of Shropshire."

"Excellent," said Norton. "It's just what I would like. We will defer these agreeable arguments till then—also the choice of a profession."

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"Then I'll say good-bye now," said Walter, "and really I didn't mean what I said a minute ago; it was very rude and quite untrue. You have done everything for me; and the only thing I really mind about going down is that I shall cease to see you. Do you believe that?"

"I believe anything you tell me, dear boy," said Norton, "and I shall miss you too awfully. You can't guess how much—but don't let us become sentimental."

II

A WEEK later Walter was waiting at Pendridge Station with a dog-cart. His depression had diminished in the course of the quiet days spent at home; but he was still in the undecided indifferent mood which follows when a melancholy disturbance has blown itself out, and when the smallest choice and the lightest decision seem arduous to make and disastrous when made. He was regretting now that he had ever asked Norton. What would Norton do with himself at Cressage? How would he endure his father's harangues and his mother's inconsequent comments. However, the thing was done, and presently he was driving across the uplands, with Norton very ill-attired and dilapidated-looking lounging beside him.

It was an incomparably beautiful afternoon, and the sunlight had the liquid golden look which comes only after days of rain. He and Norton were talking as friendly Anglo-Saxons are wont to talk, with the heavy irony which would be lambent if it could. But Norton became more and more absorbed in the scene, and when they passed the head of a valley through which was visible a great stretch of rich, well-watered plain just touched with opalescent haze and beautifully dotted and lined with the darker green of scattered woodlands, he broke out into an exclamation of pleasure. "A great slice of the world, seen at a distance, the ugliness all washed out of it—no noise, no stink—no wonder the Creator thinks it a success!"

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"You think He doesn't come down to our level?"

"Don't be profane!" said Norton rather sharply. "That's the hall-mark of the peevish intellectual who can't do anything or feel anything, and can only spit and swear."

"Yes, it was stupid of me!" said Walter humbly. "Smartness—how sick one gets of that!"

Norton smiled and nodded. "How much more tempting the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them are from a pinnacle of the Temple, than when you have come down and face the roaring crowds!"

"I didn't know *you* were ambitious," said Walter in surprise.

"No, I try to think it a proud abstention from the world. What trouble one takes to humbug oneself about oneself! The Committee which one calls one's mind is a very low affair."

Walter did not answer. He did not feel he could keep at this level.

They passed a wild common, with a shallow, reed-fringed pool, many small thickets, and some old forest trees shouldering out of the brake. "That's very jolly," said Norton. A minute or two later the road began to descend the hill into a narrow little valley, mostly clothed with woods, which came up rather steeply from the plain below, folding in among the hills.

"This is where we begin," said Walter, as they diverged from the highroad and turned into a stony lane; and five minutes later they drew up at the little gate-house of Cressage Garnet Manor. Walter had wondered how the quaint Tudor gate-house would strike Norton—perhaps as pretentious and fantastic. It was a small building of mellow Tudor brick with an arched entrance, the heavy oak doors being thrown back; over the doorway was a big mullioned

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window, flanked by small octagonal turrets on either side, capped with stone, and above, the tiled roof of the gate-house and its two chimney-stacks of twisted brickwork, one at each end.

"What!" said Norton in an amazed tone. "This your house? Why was I never told? It's the most enchanting thing I ever set eyes upon! Have you any idea how beautiful it is? What is the date of it?"

"I haven't the remotest idea," said Walter.

An old man came out and took down Norton's very scanty luggage, and then held the horse while they descended. They went in under a pretty stone-groined roof. A flagged pathway led on to the Manor, with old lime-trees on either hand, rising out of the grass. On each side of the little enclosure was a brick wall with a coping of stone, and the roofs of barns and outbuildings rose on the left beyond them. The Manor had three gables in front. The windows were mullioned, the roof was tiled, and a dozen moulded brick chimneys held up their heads with an inquiring air. Doves sat crooning on the roof, in the bright golden air now enriched by the half-tinted evening.

"Good God," said Norton, who was devouring every detail with a sort of ecstasy. "The thing is simply too wonderful to be true!"

Walter consigned his burden to an elderly blinking butler. They were in a long low hall, paved with black and white squares of stone, the walls panelled, and with two or three bits of oak furniture. He led the way to a door on the right, and saying, "Here we are, Mother!" led Norton into a panelled room, not very large, but with an air of extreme comfort in its deep chintz-covered arm-chairs. On the walls hung two or three large and obscure landscape paintings. An elderly smiling lady rose to her feet. With her large

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eyes, her small smiling puckered mouth, her grey hair worn in smooth bandeaux, and attired as she was in a dark silk gown, with a gold chain sustaining a pair of glasses, she looked to Norton almost impossibly antique—the apotheosis of Victorianism.

“Well, it’s very nice of you, Mr. Norton,” she said in a smooth rich voice, “to consent to be brought down to this out-of-the-way place—and you have been so good to Walter—he simply adores you!”

“That’s very embarrassing,” said Norton, smiling; “but I am rather vexed with him for not telling me what an extraordinarily beautiful place I was coming to.”

“It is thought to be very quaint and pretty, I believe,” said Mrs. Garnet with many complacent nods and smiles. “But I have lived here so long that I hardly see it, you know. Mr. Garnet will like explaining it all to you. I haven’t any head for dates, and it seems to be all dates, when he talks about it. The Wars of the Roses, I understand. But there’s something older still. Show Mr. Norton my own view, Walter dear!”

Walter led Norton a little awkwardly to a deep panelled embrasure. The house stood on a rapidly falling slope, and from the window Norton saw a steep flight of stone steps descending to a gate, with high gateposts and stone balls on the top, and just beyond and below, in a tiny graveyard full of old leaning headstones, a little Norman chapel, strangely bulging and buttressed, crowned by a small timbered spire; beyond it the woods closed in on the falling slope, and above them rose the steep green pastureland of the further upland.

“I can see you like it, Mr. Norton,” said the placid voice of Mrs. Garnet beside him; “so restful, is it not? You clever men at Oxford think that we poor folk who live

in a corner like this have no troubles. You wouldn't believe what worries there are! Servants—even our good old servants, you know—have tempers, and must be smoothed down; and tenants' wives are very independent nowadays; but after a worrying talk, I often go and stand and look out there, and think how little it all matters; and then—you wouldn't think I could be so foolish—I pick out a nice place for my grave, in a sunny corner of the churchyard—that's rather morbid! And then in half an hour I am as anxious to live as anyone, and begin wondering if there is any fish for dinner." She smiled and nodded at Norton, and Walter felt a little ashamed. "But what am I thinking of?" she continued. "Go and tell dear papa, Walter; he will never forgive me if he isn't here to welcome our guest. He likes to have the first word. He is as proud as anything to have a great scholar here. He has a great respect for the University."

"Well, that is very comforting," said Norton. "I wish more people felt the same!"

"Oh, I'm sure they do," said Mrs. Garnet. "Do you know, you will think me very foolish, but I was just a wee bit afraid of meeting you myself. I thought, 'What shall I find to say to a learned man like Mr. Norton?' But now I feel quite reassured. The moment I saw you, I said to myself that you wouldn't despise us. You must be very kind, I think. I hope you like our dear Walter?"

"Yes, indeed," said Norton, "who could help it? I am very fond of him, and very proud of him. I don't think I ever had a pupil I was more attached to!"

"Now that is most kind," said Mrs. Garnet, her eyes filling with tears. "Of course a mother is partial; but when I see Walter with other boys, I think there is some-

thing, what shall I say, more distinguished about him than most of them. You find him clever?"

But Norton's reply was cut short by the entry of a tall, handsome, fresh-faced, bearded man, very precisely dressed in an admirably fitting grey suit, his tie confined by a cameo ring. "Mr. Norton," he said, "a thousand apologies! I told them to warn me of the approach of your vehicle, that I might have the honour of receiving you at the gate. Your visit is deeply valued here. I am an unlearned man myself, but I respect learning. I know no distinctions of rank or class, but I respect learning, especially when it is combined with virtue and moreover accompanied by a most gratifying interest in the studies of our beloved Walter."

The Squire shook Norton's hand warmly, and Norton suspected him of having committed his little speech to memory.

Refreshment was proffered and refused, and as it was now near dinner-time, the Squire recommended "an adjournment to our respective rooms." He added, "You will find your things bestowed by our old butler; but you will no doubt have books and papers to arrange—we have a little study for your sole use, my dear sir, the privacy of which will be jealousy respected. You must confer with Walter about our rustic time-table, and you must not scruple to suggest any alteration that will suit your hours of study. We shall only claim you in the afternoons and at our simple meals. You need have no anxiety on this head."

III

AFTER two or three days at the Manor, Norton began to wonder how long he could support the conversation of Mr. Garnet. The Squire spoke as a rule, whenever he was in the room, in one continuous harangue, and at meals, if he desisted in order to swallow a little food, Mrs. Garnet took up the tale. It seemed to Norton that Mr. Garnet was a very vain and pompous old man, whose only form of idealism was to repose lusciously in the glory and antiquity of the Garnet family. He was full of stories of his old prowess in the hunting-field, and as a game shot, and of the respect and deference which he enjoyed in the county. The food and appointments of the house were costly even to extravagance, and Mr. Garnet had evidently lavished large sums of money on the buildings. On the other hand, the farms and cottages on the estate seemed in the last stage of dilapidation. Yet, in a conversation which Norton had with him, he spoke as though Walter's prospects were of the most glowing kind. "I want my dear boy," he said, "to have *every* advantage. My own life has been mainly devoted to securing for him a far ampler provision than it was my fortune to inherit. You see how simply we live! My wife and I deny ourselves travel, we deny ourselves the London season, we entertain little. It is no sacrifice to myself—I am content with my books, my communing with nature, my good tenants' concerns, my county duties. I am a philosopher, Mr. Norton, though

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not in the more technical significance that you would attach to the word—but for my dear wife, whose only preoccupation is the pleasure of those around her, it is a sacrifice, though cheerfully made. I desire then that my dearest boy should have *every* advantage—that he should see the world, that he **should** be equipped to mingle on equal terms with the best and highest society. We ask for your co-operation in effecting this.”

Norton was bored to desperation by harangues of this nature, which made him feel as though Mr. Garnet were translating aloud from an eighteenth-century German book on education. These considerations were all, as the Squire said, preparatory to Norton’s advice being requested; but this actual point was never reached. Mrs. Garnet was better. Norton could not acquit her of a distinct degree of fatuity, and her talk was a series of leisurely divergences from the main theme, or, in her husband’s presence, a mere chorus of Hosannas. The Squire was fond of relating instances of his adroit manipulation of troublesome or important people, and Mrs. Garnet’s function evidently was to supply the ample credit which the Squire could not avowedly claim.

“The Duke said to me,” Mr. Garnet would say, “‘And how would Mr. Garnet advise us to proceed? There is no one on the bench’—you will forgive my quoting the Duke’s words, but they are essential to the comprehension of my story—‘no one on the bench, who can so perfectly interpret and even anticipate the instinctive processes of our humbler neighbours, and we should all repose entire confidence in his judgment.’ ‘Well, Duke,’ I said, ‘though I can hardly claim to deserve your commendation, it seems to me to be a case where leniency would do more to conciliate than severity to deter.’ ‘An admirable maxim,’ said

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the Duke, 'and no less admirably phrased! Gentlemen, we may dismiss the case.' ”

“Well, dear,” joined in Mrs. Garnet, “Mr. Norton will forgive me if I call that beautiful. Not that I trust the Duke’s judgment very far in these cases. He is very hasty—the Duke is decidedly hasty, and in his own circle, they tell me, quite shockingly profane. But with Mr. Garnet at his elbow, I have heard people say, the Duke cannot go very far wrong!”

“The Duke is an unassuming man,” said Mr. Garnet, with a little bow and smirk to his wife. “You may observe, Mr. Norton, that I address him as ‘Duke.’ Some of our magistrates prefer to say ‘Your Grace.’ But there was a Garnet at Cressage when the Duke’s ancestor—no doubt a very worthy man—was a wool-stapler at Shrewsbury, and I feel myself entitled to address him on a footing of perfect equality. He has no reason to be ashamed of being a Duke—I do not blame him—but these titles are mushroom growths. I may say that I regard it as a greater distinction to give my name *to* a place than to take a title *from* a place!”

The worst of Mr. Garnet’s stories was that everyone, whether Duke or gamekeeper, always seemed to speak in the same measured and antithetical clauses, which deprived the narrative of any dramatic force. Norton too noticed that it did not seem to be expected that Walter should ever contribute to the talk. He was still regarded by his father and mother in the light of an unfledged boy. But one thing Norton could not fail to notice, namely that the three were united by a bond of very real and deep affection. Neither his father nor mother ever addressed each other or Walter in any but the language of affection and compliment. Walter was himself always on the watch to do any

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small service for his father and mother, and these little offices of tenderness were always eagerly and gratefully acknowledged. In fact, Norton was torn between his admiration of the extraordinary harmony which existed between the three, and his consciousness of the absurd complacency of the Squire backed by the copious adulation of Mrs. Garnet. The servants, too, were obviously devoted to the old couple, and even the tenants seemed to hold them in high honour, though the Squire always managed to evade any request that involved the smallest expenditure. It was certainly a very odd mixture!

Fortunately the Squire always excused himself after breakfast on the plea of business, though his correspondence seemed to consist mainly of advertisements; and Norton took long rambles with Walter, who carried a gun, and occasionally shot a rabbit or a pigeon.

"I'm afraid you find my father's talk a little lengthy!" said Walter one day to him.

"He has got into the habit, no doubt, of thinking aloud," said Norton. "Though I prefer it very much to a grumpy taciturnity which seems to be the other alternative; but what I really do admire and envy," he went on, "is the extraordinary courtesy and affection of your father and mother. My own home is a country vicarage, where I am afraid we consider it a virtue not to speak unless one has anything to say, and then to say it in the frankest manner possible; but that's very uncivilized, you know."

"I don't believe," said Walter, "that I have ever heard my father or mother say a sharp word to anyone in my life; they certainly never have done so to each other—nor to me. I was rather a tiresome little boy, but my severest punishment was to be told by my mother that she must tell my father—which will make him miserable for a day

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or a week or a fortnight,' she used to add, according to the heinousness of the offence. She used to take me to the study and say to my father, 'Henry, I am going to make you very unhappy,' and when she had told her story, she used to slip away, and my father used to put his arm round me and say, 'Now you are going to tell papa all about it; I can see you are sorry already!' It all sounds very sentimental, but it worked well. It wasn't as if I was pampered. He used to take me out riding in all weathers, and send me to the meets, and make me go out with the keeper, 'to get mamma a dinner, and a few birds to send to her friends.' It sounds very silly to you, perhaps; but the result is that I would do anything in the world for either of them, and could ask them anything or tell them anything; and I believe that the wish not to have anything hateful to tell them has really kept me clear of no end of mischief."

"Well, if you care to know," said Norton, "I think it quite irrational and perfectly indefensible, and yet entirely beautiful. The wisdom of the ages is all against it, and yet I expect it is the solution which is staring us in the face all the time."

"I am not sure about that," said Walter. "I think there is something missing; but perhaps, considering everything, it is ungrateful for me to say so."

"Not ungrateful," said Norton, "but if you had known the other kind of bringing up, as I have, you would see that what you have missed is a very small thing compared with what you have gained."

IV

ON the first Sunday Walter was very visibly relieved when he found that Norton was quite willing to go to church. "One should bow the head at all altars," Norton had said, quoting Flaubert; and Norton himself was delighted to find that the Manor party occupied a strange painted and canopied Jacobean pew, looking down on the church, which stood in a sort of choir transept, and behind which was the vestry. The sharp colours of the pompous pew had mellowed agreeably by time, and Norton was still more pleased to find, when he took up the old red leather prayer-book in his place, with CRESSAGE GARNET MANOR in gold letters on the side, that on the praying-desk, facing each worshipper, was depicted an enormous open eye, with the motto *Tu Dñe vides me*. He was struck during the service with the whimsical thought how exactly the pew represented the Squire's mind, in its garishness and pomposity, and in all the elaborate devices to secure privacy and seclusion, when neither was needed.

The congregation that clattered in was very small. The Vicar was a middle-aged man, self-possessed and a little stern of aspect, who read the lessons as if they had a meaning, and whose sermon contained two or three passages of pleasing acidity.

In the little chapel beside the altar were several effigies, an armoured knight on a tomb, drowsy courtier-like figures

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on ledges, with heads propped on delicate hands. A great Jacobean tomb rich in gilded emblems. A Chantry bas-relief, with a slender and beautiful girlish figure, a marble tablet or two. Walter led him to a rude brass of a knight on the wall, and pointed to the epitaph. Norton read:

*Jesus Christ, most of might,
Have a mercy of John le Garnet, knight,
And of his wyffe Elizabeth,
Wch̄ out of this world is past by death;
Wch̄ founded this chapel here.
Helpe them with yr hartly praer;
That they may come to that place
Where ever is joy and solace.¹*

"That is in 1470," said Walter, "it goes straight to the point, at all events. Why should one be proud of descent from these very ordinary people? None of them ever did anything of importance; and yet it doesn't feel like an unwholesome pride!"

"It is certainly a rich and romantic background," said Norton, smiling.

He was still more pleased when he found Mr. Goring at lunch, together with his wife, who appeared to be a voluble and good-natured woman. At luncheon Mr. Goring behaved, Norton thought, with just the right shade of deference to the Squire and Mrs. Garnet, but he was careful to include both Walter and Norton himself in the talk, and spoke his mind very plainly and freely when a parish matter was discussed.

After luncheon, Mr. Goring asked Norton if they might have a little chat about Oxford, and going out into the garden, they sat down in a little recess in one of the curtain-walls, on an old oak settee. After a few words about

¹ In a chapel at Luton, founded by John le Wenlocke.

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Oxford, Mr. Goring said, "You are Walter's tutor, I believe, Mr. Norton; he seems to have done well? I have known Walter all his life and take a very great interest in him. What do you think of him?"

"It's rather hard to say; he is in a transition state."

"What do you mean exactly?"

"Well, he has a great deal of ability. He has got a First, without so far as I can see taking the smallest interest in his subjects. He is very fastidious, and though he is a popular man, he has really no intimate friends. Yet he seems to me to know his own mind, and, under an appearance of indifference, to be going his own way much more than most men. He is rather a mystery to me,—and yet he is more confidential than most young men. I feel that he doesn't tell me all that is in his mind, but only a small and suitable selection."

"Yes," said the Vicar, musing, "that is so—he is a reserved youth, but I suspect him of caring very much for certain things, or at all events being prepared to care very much. His bringing up has of course been against him."

"Surely not!" said Norton; "his relations with his father and mother seem to me to be very fine."

"Up to a certain point, yes," said the Vicar. "But that kind of affection is a cramping thing. His parents—it is no good beating about the bush, if we are to talk seriously—are not wise people. They are entirely ignorant of the world and very uncultivated, and they have an immense idea of their consequence. They have brought him up like a plant in a greenhouse, to a great extent for their own amusement. They have no idea what is going on in his mind, and if he told them they would not understand it. The marvel is that things have turned out so well. To speak plainly, the atmosphere of this house stifles me; it

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is unreal from top to bottom. The Squire, to be candid, regards every living soul he meets as a mirror to regard his own perfections in. He is a miserly landlord, and I can't get him to help in anything in the parish. Yet the people revere him, and think no end of him. Mrs. Garnet is full of kindness, but her one idea is to keep the Squire 'in all his ways,' like the angels in the Psalm. I have a notion that Walter is not in the least taken in by all this, but he is too loyal to give a hint of it. The question is, what is to be done? I want to get Walter out of it at any cost."

"I don't think it has done him much harm," said Norton. "And knowing what I know of young men's homes, I can't say that I think it nothing to have developed and kept alive this extraordinary family affection. It seems to me a very rare thing and a very beautiful thing."

"Yes, I don't want to decry it," said Mr. Goring, "but to acquiesce is only accepting a situation and making the best of it. It doesn't make things any better. The household is a little close corporation, a mutual benefit society. You know the proverb, 'to love is easy—what is difficult is to respect'? I admit that it is in a way a happy home, but so is many a stagnant pool."

"I don't suppose it is necessary for Walter to have a profession, so far as money goes?" said Norton.

"There again I don't know. The Squire is an extravagant man; he has spent thousands on the house."

"I had thought of advising them to send Walter abroad."

"That would be excellent; but will they let him go?"

"I'll have a try anyhow," said Norton.

"Yes, do," said the Vicar, adding, "I hope you will forgive me for intervening thus. But we have no children

of our own, and Walter is very dear to me. Perhaps I am a little jealous of the beautiful united circle?"

This conversation greatly quickened Norton's interest in Walter. He felt himself to blame for his *inertia*. He had been idly amusing himself by watching the situation, when he ought to have been finding more out about Walter, and trying to clear away obstacles from his path. But though he had a great sense of duty to the intellects of his pupils, he shrank from interfering with their minds and hearts; it seemed to him to be Jesuitical and secret, and to partake of the nature of sin. He was quite ready to advise, but he had no desire to influence.

But he was diplomatic enough in his approaches. He told Walter that the Squire had been consulting him about the future, and that before answering, he wanted to know what Walter's own wishes and aims were.

He was astonished to find how definite Walter's views were all the time. Walter said, in a very deprecating way, and with an evident desire not to lapse into any priggishness, that he was on the whole not interested in moral problems nor in the intellectual life—philosophy, metaphysics, political and social problems had no attraction for him; and what he was really allured by was the element of beauty in life. He went on to say with much diffidence that when people talked about religion and duty in the formal sense, and the intellectual evolution of the world, the whole thing seemed to him unutterably arid—but that beauty seemed to him to be the one divine thing beckoning to men and inviting them with an irresistible surprise and charm to a pure and free region where gross, sensual and material things counted for nothing: that life couldn't be a matter of rules and precepts, of prudence and security, but of impulses in an ascending scale; and that he had in himself a creative sense, calling

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him to make something beautiful—whether for his own satisfaction, or for the pleasure of others, he did not know—and that he must do this through writing in some form; he had no technical comprehension of art and music, but a great feeling for the value of words.

All this Norton elicited, shamefacedly and spasmodically, by seemingly ingenuous questions, and liberal sympathy. He saw to his amazement and self-condemnation that behind the neat and conventional indifference, there was something burning and glowing in the back of Walter's mind—a sacred fire. But then Walter's mood suddenly ebbed and

“like a fountain's sickening pulse, retired.”

He said he was afraid he had been talking great rot. “My dear Walter,” said Norton, “you must take a leaf out of Mr. George Moore's book, and learn to be ashamed of nothing except of being ashamed. You mustn't be always on the defensive.”

The talk ended clumsily and confusedly. But from that moment, Norton was aware that he was in a new relation to Walter. A wall had been broken down between their spirits, and the passionate self-abandonment that he had witnessed was to him one of the surprising experiences of his life, a splendid secret not to be shared with anyone, and of which he must not even ever remind Walter himself.

They had been walking together that day out upon the uplands to the North, over a long stretch of wild forest-land, the remnant of some old chase, with heather-tufts and thorn-thickets, and here and there a gnarled and ancient tree. Far down below, the huge plain glimmered and shone, and great rays had now and then streamed down from the sun, hidden behind gold-rimmed clouds. It was

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a beautiful thing to regain the shelter of the wood, to pace along the green rides, with the sharp wholesome breath of the woodland wafted by them; to come suddenly upon the dusky chapel, among its huddled graves, with the tall gables of the manor looking tranquilly over, and to see the little gate-house, which seemed to peer anxiously down the sweet-scented avenue of limes, as if to mark any that went out, or returned, or entered in.

But to come from all this to the clatter of the teacups, to listen to the Squire proclaiming his own generosity and prescience, with Mrs. Garnet's obsequious applause and vapid interventions, and to see Walter moving about smiling, with anxious care for their most trivial needs, was almost more than Norton could bear. It seemed to him like some harem with a noble captive slave attending on the whim of a tyrant, fuming among his concubines, and roused in his mind a sharp disgust at the solemn inanity that seemed to have so cruel and relentless a power over life.

THE Squire announced one morning in the course of breakfast that visitors were expected to luncheon.

“Mr. Worsley,” he said, “is a worthy man and, what I conceive is rare in the legal profession, a sympathetic man. Every now and then I have some little design—sometimes perhaps a little too idealistic, as my designs are apt to be—involving an unusual expense. I submit such to Mr. Worsley. Either he works out some practical execution, or he tells me with courteous frankness that it is impracticable—I am guided largely by his advice. He is to be accompanied by his daughter, now, since the recent death of his wife, the mistress of his house—a fact which it behoves me to be among the first to recognize. Our little luncheon-party then—for Mr. and Mrs. Goring are also joining us—is not a mere social ceremony; it partakes of the nature of a recognition of Mr. Worsley’s efficiency. I gather from his letter that he values the privilege highly. He has partaken of luncheon here before, but as a mere adjunct to a business interview. My reason for telling you all this is that I mean to call upon the younger members of our circle—if I may include Mr. Norton in that designation—to do their best by chivalrous attentions to save the girl, who is, I imagine, quite unused to any but professional company, from the embarrassment she may naturally feel and be excused for feeling. For the enter-

tainment of the elder members of the company, mamma and I gladly hold ourselves responsible." And the Squire looked round at the table with the air of a man pronouncing a benediction.

"We mustn't let papa tire himself too much," said good Mrs. Garnet. "My husband, Mr. Norton, is not one of those who at his own table or at anyone else's can be content to be a mere listener and consumer. I always say that he puts to shame the gruff and silent people whom in old days we used to meet more than we do now. He has a very sensitive conscience about such things, and he is never satisfied unless he is contributing largely to the mirth and animation of a party."

"That is a fact," said Norton, almost alarmed at his own effrontery, "which I have already had the pleasure of discovering for myself."

When the two young men went out, Walter said to Norton, "You played up well this morning, Harry, with your little compliments. Isn't it odd, though, that when my father is talking—it is rather an old-fashioned style, I expect—everyone who joins in uses the same sort of sentences. Your remark was not in the least in your style, and quite in his."

"Isn't that always so?" said Norton. "I always notice in printed letters how much their style is affected by the correspondents to whom they are addressed. Ruskin's letters to Carlyle might have been written by Carlyle himself—it is a sort of unconscious sympathy. But who are these people? I like to know about people before I meet them."

"I believe Worsley is a man who has raised himself," said Walter. "He was once clerk to a firm of solicitors—now he is senior partner. I don't altogether like him,

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though he is very civil. I have met the daughter once or twice—rather nice-looking, but a little intense. Mrs. Goring is a dear old thing, rather a pal of my mother's. And it won't be a very *real* affair. My father rather alarms people. He always seems to be the only person in the room. Why is that, do you think?"

"Because he *is* a very real person, I expect," said Norton.

When Norton came into the parlour, the Gorings had arrived. Goring was engaged in discussing some philanthropic matter with Mrs. Garnet. Mrs. Goring was listening to the Squire, and he heard her say, "No, it's no use, Squire, your pretending not to know. You know more about the parish down to the smallest details, than any of us, and how you do it, I never can make out."

"I keep my eyes and ears open," said the Squire in great good humour.

"Yes, but so do we all," said Mrs. Goring, "but we see and hear nothing. My dear William sees and hears nothing. I have to be always nudging him. It's a signal between us for him to say something. 'But I have nothing to say,' he says. 'Never mind that,' I say, 'say anything—admire something in the room; if it is wrong, I can set it right.' Look at William now—he has already forgotten where he is—he is no courtier."

"My dear Mrs. Goring," said the Squire, "we are old friends, and there is no need for ceremony here."

"Yes, but, excuse me, there *is*," said Mrs. Goring. "Of course you have a way of putting people at their ease, but you are a very formidable person for all that."

The Squire beckoned to Norton. "Let me present to you Mr. Norton, Walter's Oxford tutor. Walter owes everything to Mr. Norton in the way of academical distinction."

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"He owes much more to his inherited abilities," said Norton, smiling.

"You are all determined to put me out of countenance to-day," said the Squire. "I can never persuade Mr. Norton what an ignoramus I am."

"If it were not you, Squire," said Mrs. Goring, "I should say you were fishing for a compliment."

At this moment Mr. Worsley made his appearance. He was a lean, large-featured man with very conspicuous white teeth and a carefully disposed smile. His daughter, thought Norton, was a remarkably pretty girl, fresh-coloured, boyish-looking, with large clear eyes. An exchange of courtesies took place. Mrs. Garnet, to Norton's pleasure, drew the girl to her and gave a motherly kiss. Mr. Worsley bowed to each member of the party with much elasticity, and uttered polite impartial greetings in a dry expressionless voice. "Most kind of you to ask us—very good of you to include my Helen—a red-letter day for us both—Mr. Goring, you are looking very well—it does you credit, Mrs. Goring—Ah, Mr. Walter, I have to congratulate you, a really most distinguished performance—Mr. Norton, of Stafford College?—this is indeed a pleasure—we have done a little business with your good Bursar, sir, about the farm at Aston Bulleign. Really a most interesting reunion this, Mrs. Garnet."

The Squire listened smiling, as a drowsy deity might accept a psalm. A procession was mustered; the Squire was adamant about going in arm-in-arm to a party of ceremony. He led in Mrs. Goring, Miss Worsley fell to Norton. Mr. Worsley, with a little disclaimer from him in Mr. Goring's favour, led off Mrs. Garnet, and Mr. Goring, not ill-pleased, tucked his arm into Walter's.

At luncheon, Norton found himself between Mr. and

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Mrs. Goring, while Walter was between Helen and Mr. Worsley.

The Squire, after a few elaborate compliments to Helen, resigned himself to the more congenial atmosphere of Mrs. Goring, and then assumed the general direction of the talk. To Norton's delight, the Duke and the Magistrates' meeting soon made their appearance. "You can bear me out in this, Worsley," the Squire said at intervals.

"Indeed I can," said Mr. Worsley; "and I must beg leave to assure the present company that there were other expressions that fell from the Duke, when Mr. Garnet left us, which His Grace could hardly have entered into in Mr. Garnet's presence, but which I must be allowed the privilege of recounting."

"Come, Worsley," said the Squire, "this is too much like eavesdropping."

But Mrs. Goring was so insistent, and declared that her pleasure would be so ruined if she did not hear, that the Squire relented.

As a matter of literal fact, the door had no sooner closed behind Mr. Garnet on the occasion referred to, when the Duke said in a very lusty voice, "Good God, what a fellow! He seems to think we have nothing better to do than to listen to him. Let us get on with the business." This, however, was Mr. Worsley's version.

"The Duke began by observing—you know his hearty way," said Mr. Worsley, "'What a good fellow!' He went on to say that they could hardly be better employed than in listening to Mr. Garnet, but that as he was obliged to go, they must endeavour to get through the business without the advantage of his advice—and the Duke," added Mr. Worsley, "is not a man who minces matters."

Mrs. Goring clapped her hands. "And our Squire is surprised that we are proud of him!" she said.

"There's only one omission in your story, Worsley," said Mr. Goring.

"Pray what is that?" said Worsley a little fidgety.

"Well, I wasn't there, of course; but anyone who knows the Duke must be aware that he could hardly have got through so long a sentence, without the addition of what shall I say?—an expletive!"

Everyone smiled. "Well, I call that rather a shame!" said Mrs. Garnet.

"Mr. Goring is right!" said Mr. Worsley. "I omitted it, with perhaps undue discretion. His Grace did emphasize—I might say 'underlined' one word, in his soldierly fashion. But I should add that it only redounded to Mr. Garnet's credit."

"I do not myself," said the Squire, looking round with a smile, "indulge in such 'underlining'—I thank Mr Worsley for that word—but such expressions are largely a matter of temperament and usage."

"They have no moral significance of course?" said Mr. Goring ironically.

"You are right," said the Squire. "With the Duke they are merely a matter of military emphasis. We may remember that our Iron Duke was not wholly guiltless in this respect. But out of regard for our younger companions, we will not pursue the subject. There are many things in this life of ours which we may regret, but are powerless to remove—and Mr. Norton will bear me out when I say that human nature has a certain irrepressible element."

"Yes," said Norton, "even a conscientious Don cannot wholly eliminate that."

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"The Bishop told me the other day," said Mrs. Goring, "that he had good reason to believe that profanity in conversation was more or less decisively on the wane."

"That is certainly my experience," said Mr. Worsley; "it is far less common now to hear these hasty and, to my mind, very undesirable expressions on the lips of clients. But let us hear what Mr. Walter says about the younger generation."

"Such words," said Walter, "have not quite gone out; but one of our men was dining the other day with the Master, and an old Colonel told a story, when the ladies had gone out, which Vickers said was rather highly-seasoned. The Master only said, 'You must tell that story again to the ladies, when we go to the drawing-room.'"

"Perhaps the good Master did not know what the meaning of the words was," said Mr. Worsley.

"Perhaps," said Walter.

At this point Helen became suddenly rather red, and drank a glass of water hurriedly. Mrs. Goring came gallantly to the rescue. "There is one thing I meant to ask you, Squire. What is there in the rumour I have heard that a peerage may shortly be offered to the representative of one of our oldest County families?"

"I have heard nothing of it," said the Squire, "though I can well understand His Majesty thinking it desirable to gild the crudity of some of these recent creations by a touch of tradition and antiquity. The House of Lords is lamentably lacking in tone. I understand indeed that it has become almost habitual for the Lord Chancellor to be the offspring of a hairdresser, and I can hardly believe that our hairdressers—though it is a most respectable and, I might say, necessary avocation—can claim so high a proportion of representation."

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"But you would admit that it is an encouragement to the lower orders," said Mr. Worsley.

"It is an encouragement, no doubt," said the Squire; "but I am constitutionally unable to take the popular point of view; and in my old-fashioned way I consider that the lower orders have received far more encouragement than they have deserved."

"Papa dear," said Mrs. Garnet ingratiatingly, "you must not allow our guests to be too serious on a day like this. This is Helen's party, and I am going to carry her and Mrs. Goring off for a chat over our coffee. We shall leave you to your wine and to your—what was the word, Walter—your well-seasoned stories."

"A very tactful reminder, my dear," said the Squire. "Miss Helen will forgive me for seeming to forget that our future is behind us, while her past is still in front of her."

"Admirably said, sir," said Mr. Worsley. "I must remember that. Her future is before her and our past is behind us. Very true; and if I may say so, very epigrammatic."

As they rose, Norton saw Walter say something in a low tone to Helen. She shook her head, and went sedately out with the Dowagers.

VI

WHEN the party broke up, the Squire asked Mr. Worsley to step into his study for a few minutes. The ceremoniousness of the party consisted in the fact that the business which followed was an adjunct of the party, instead of the other way. Then Mrs. Garnet was needed at the conclave; and presently Mr. Norton was summoned as a witness to some document. Walter thereupon asked Helen if she would care to look round the place. Helen joyfully assented, and they went out together.

"I am afraid you were very much amused by our proceedings to-day," said Walter.

"Amused? What makes you say that? I was much too terrified to be amused."

"Too terrified to laugh," said Walter; "I admit it was all rather absurd."

"It wasn't anyone in particular," said Helen, "but it was the mixture—the idea that you and I were to be sheltered from any suspicion of the wickedness of the world. How you could have dared to say what you did simply beats me. It was really that which finished me off."

"Grown-up people," said Walter, "—you and I, remember, are not grown up—never have any idea that they have quitted the stage, and that the play is really ours. Kings and Queens are always in the background in plays. What amused me was that all sorts of arrangements were made beforehand to prevent your feeling awkward."

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"But I did feel awkward," said Helen, "until I suddenly saw that you were all right, and your friend—what is his name?"

"Harry Norton—yes, he is all right—he is rather on the border-line. He is my tutor, you know!"

"Your tutor! I wonder you don't say he is your father's tutor."

"He looks older than he is."

"That is enough to make anyone unhappy," said Helen; "he looks unhappy—perhaps he looks unhappier than he is."

"I don't think he is at all unhappy—why should he be unhappy?"

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Yes, he is the greatest friend I have got."

"And you have never thought of asking him whether he is unhappy! That is so like men. The first thing a girl tells you, when two girls make friends, is why she is unhappy."

"Are all girls unhappy?"

"Yes, dreadfully."

"What an awful idea! Why are they?"

"We are so down-trodden, you know. We are expected to be always smiling and unselfish."

"I thought you were so by nature," said Walter. "My mother is, at all events, and so is my father."

"I am afraid of your father," said Helen. "His smile makes me tremble—now I think your mother a perfect dear."

They were standing on the terrace overlooking the Church. Helen looked round and drew a long breath. "Well, I call this place simply lovely," she said, "and anyhow I have seen it and been to lunch here—it will make my friends wild with jealousy."

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"Another cause of unhappiness?"

"Oh, no, jealousy doesn't make you unhappy, it excites you. But Cressage Garnet is such a mystery to everyone. People who pass the gate-house wonder what on earth is going on here."

"I don't understand," said Walter. "We live a very quiet life, like scores of people."

"Oh, but it is the *way* you live it which is the mystery," said Helen; "but I ought not to talk like this. My father would go out of his wits if he heard me."

"No, do tell me," said Walter; "you mustn't excite my curiosity like this. What is the mystery? I must know!"

"I don't mind telling *you*," said Helen, "but you mustn't give me away. It's just the fact that there isn't anything to tell. Everybody knows about everybody else in Bridgenorth. But here you live, nobody sees you, nobody hears about you. Your father with the manners of . . ." She stopped and looked at Walter.

"Go on," said Walter. "The manners of what?"

"Someone said 'of a deposed prince'—and your mother who agrees with everyone and puts everyone at their ease—and yet both so seldom seen!"

"This is very exciting," said Walter; "and what about me?"

"No, I really can't," said Helen. "I seem to have taken leave of all my manners."

"The least you can do to make up is to tell me," said Walter. "People see *me*, at all events."

"Yes, but then you are so grave and quiet and learned," said Helen with a faint blush. "You are rather princely too."

"Condescending and painfully kind?" said Walter.

"No—but people say you are the only person who

doesn't seem to care whether anyone knows who you are or not."

"What could be more royal?" said Walter.

"But *I* don't say so," said Helen. "I knew the moment I saw you that you were all right."

At this moment the butler appeared on the terrace. "Mrs. Garnet would wish you to step in, Mr. Walter," he said.

"I must go too," said Helen; "and it's awful to think of what I have said. I shall be in agonies about it when I wake up to-morrow."

"What nonsense!" said Walter. "You must just go on thinking I am all right."

"Oh, I can do that!"

While this was taking place, Mr. and Mrs. Goring were making their way slowly home.

"My goodness!" said Mrs. Goring; "that sort of thing does take it out of me!"

"I don't think you ought to allow yourself to talk as you do to the Squire," said Mr. Goring; "it seems to me on the verge of being hypocritical. He ought not to be encouraged."

"So that is all the thanks I get," said Mrs. Goring, smiling at her husband. "Really, William, you are rather aggravating. If it were not for me, you would not be on speaking terms with the Squire. I only say what he expects me to say; and I look up and see you glowering in a corner, as if we were an unruly Sunday School Class."

Mr. Goring smiled grimly. "I know you save me from disgrace, dear," he said; "but I don't want you to do it at the price of your own self-respect."

"My self-respect!" said Mrs. Goring. "Why, I only

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try to be what St. Paul expressly commands all Christians to be—all things to all men. If you would read your Bible a little more thoroughly, instead of preaching on a few texts which you happen to like, you would be twice as good a Christian. I am asked there to swell the chorus of praise. Very well! I swell the chorus. I might just as well refuse to say, 'and with thy spirit,' if I didn't like the clergyman who was reading the service. Would that be on the verge of being hypocritical?"

"I can't argue with you, dear," said Mr. Goring admiringly. "You are far too quick for me. I only know what I like and what I dislike."

"That's not a very good outfit for a professing Christian."

"Spare me, dear," said Mr. Goring. "If you can talk as you did to-day without violence to your conscience, I have not another word to say. No doubt you keep the Squire in a good humour."

"You leave it to me," said Mrs. Goring, patting her husband's arm. "Now I have something else to say. I liked that Worsley girl to-day; she seemed to me to have some spirit. Did you see how much we all amused her?"

"She seemed to me a well-set-up girl," said Mr. Goring, "but rather painfully shy."

"William, you are simply the worst judge of character I ever saw—it is all part of your guileless nature. That girl is no more shy than the Squire. I must see more of her. It is a pity she has such a dreadful father."

"Dreadful? Worsley a dreadful father?" said Mr. Goring. "He seems to me a very honest man, if a little too obsequious."

"I daresay he is a good man of business," said Mrs. Goring, "but I don't trust him an inch. I should never

trust a man with a chin like that. That sort of chin means no conscience."

"What has his chin to do with his conscience?"

"More than you think, William! But it is worse than that. Plenty of people get on quite well without a conscience; but Worsley is a snob, and he would like his daughter to be one."

"I can't follow these excursions of fancy."

"No, and I don't want you to. Let me go on. I liked that Norton man very much. That's my idea of a good fellow."

"I thought him rather too anxious to please."

"You are in a very censorious mood to-day; what about Mrs. Garnet and Walter?"

"Mrs. Garnet is a very good woman who does her best under great difficulties. I have often told you this. She is much too good for the Squire."

"She isn't a wise woman, William; but she is a very kindly one—and now let us finish it off. What about Walter?"

"I had a talk to Mr. Norton about him the other day. I am very fond of Walter, as you know. But I am a little anxious about him."

"You seem to be anxious about everyone to-day; it is really rather dismal. What is wrong with Walter?"

"He seems to me restless. I should have thought his success would have steadied him; but I gathered from Mr. Norton that he was a little cynical about it."

"William, your goodness is really quite impenetrable. I know what is the matter with Walter. He has been developing his mind at the expense of everything else. He has no friends to speak of, and now his heart is going to take a great jump forward. The wonder is that mewed

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up in that stuffy old house, tied up like a house-dog, always dancing attendance on that terrible old man, he hasn't broken out before."

"He's a very good son," said Mr. Goring.

"Yes, far too good to be wholesome," said Mrs. Goring. "But the end of all this—and you probably won't see the connection—is that I am going to ask that girl to lunch, and I am going to ask Walter to meet her. I think she is just the sort of girl to take him a little out of himself."

"I think that is rather a dangerous pastime, my dear," said Mr. Goring; "she is not at all the sort of girl whom the Squire would approve of as a daughter-in-law."

"How literal you are, William," said Mrs. Goring, prodding him gently in the side. "Who said anything about marriage? I should just like them to fall a little in love with each other, that is all; it will do them all the good in the world. No, it's no use your saying that marriage is a sacrament, because I am quite aware of it; but it is a good thing for young people to be violently interested in other young people, even if nothing comes of it. Why before you met me, I daresay there were . . ."

"Agnes dear, please say no more on this head," said Mr. Goring rather gravely. "In these worldly matters I am entirely in your hands. I know that you would not connive at anything which would be painful to Mrs. Garnet, or which would be prejudicial to the young persons concerned. Have anyone you like to luncheon. I quite agree that our dear Walter would be the better for a little more youthful society."

"You dear old coward!" said Mrs. Goring. "Leave it all to me, there's a darling! Your faithful wife won't disgrace you, even though she doesn't believe that the

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relations between a patron and an incumbent quite amount to a sacrament."

Mr. Goring shook his head regretfully with an indulgent smile.

VII

ONE morning as they walked together in the silent tangled woods beneath the Manor, with the soft wind murmuring like a falling sea among the treetops, Norton turned suddenly to Walter and said, "Do you realize that I have been here for more than three weeks? I had no intention of inflicting myself on you for so long."

"I hope it means you have enjoyed yourself," said Walter. "I am ashamed to think how little we have done to amuse you, but I can't tell you what a difference it has made to me; and you have fallen so naturally into our routine that I have quite forgotten to ask; have you been bored?"

"*Bored?*" said Norton. "My dear Walter, what a notion! I can't remember a time I have enjoyed so much for years. A perfectly lovely house, delightful scenery, the best of fare, a kind host and hostess, nothing expected of me, and my pleasantest friend to walk with! No, what bores one is to be resolutely entertained, to be carried hither and thither, to be held at arm's length and regarded as a tiresome responsibility—that is what bores one."

"Well," said Walter, smiling and with a little sigh, "if *you* have liked it, I can only say it has been the time of my life. The only thing that weighs on me is that one reason for your coming was that you should dictate my future to my people—and we haven't got any nearer to that."

"I have several times begun to talk about it to your father,"

said Norton, "but we have always gone off at a tangent. The question is, what do you *want* to do?"

"I don't know," said Walter; "but the fact is that I got into rather a bad mood at Oxford. I didn't believe in what I was doing—in fact I really worked mostly to please you. And then—I don't think this is mere priggishness—it seemed to me that the old life of school was going on just the same—work, games, ragging, chattering—and that it wasn't leading anywhere. I felt that I should either like to amuse myself in my own way, not try to be amused in other people's ways, or else to be doing real things, which I had to do whether I liked them or not, and which meant something."

"Yes, I know that feeling," said Norton. "I have had it myself. One feels like Mr. Winkle, always taking off one's coat and saying one is going to begin."

"Yes, but there's a lot more than that," said Walter. "I must try to say this, however priggish you may think it. There are so many interesting things which are constantly in my mind, mostly to do with beauty—beautiful things, fine ideas, splendid ways of doing things, emotions that make one more free and cleaner instead of more cramped and grubbier. I *don't* mean the sort of things that are an excuse for sentiment, and drugged reveries and general beastliness, but the sort of things that were in the background, let me say, of Plato's mind or Shakespeare's mind. Why can't one talk about such things to anyone, not even to you? And if one talks about them to other men, why is it at once taken for granted that one is the nastiest sort of æsthete, though I hate what is meant by an æsthete even more than I hate what is meant by a Philistine? Yet one feels it affected, almost shameful to talk about these things. I don't mean to say that the undergraduates—the

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men I lived among—aren't good fellows; they are very good things of their kind, and it is a good kind. They are lively, energetic, amusing, very faithful friends, very efficient—they are everything except exciting. They are all cast in the same mould, and have the same views and instincts, down to their vices, even. They tolerate the manly vices, they despise the sentimental vices. I get stifled by knowing exactly what they will say and do; and they never seem to be tired of the same old game or to want anything different. Does that seem to you very stuffy and discontented?"

"Not in the least," said Norton. "I agree with you. I think the type is a good one, but of course one may have too much of the best. But how is one to get anything different? One ought to try perhaps; but Pater tried, and made a considerable hash of it. The question is, where and how do you expect to find anything else? I don't think you would find it in any of the so-called Bohemian artistic sets. You would find a great deal more mutual admiration, very little more liberty. You see you demand controlled morals and uncontrolled emotions—that's a difficult combination to discover."

"I want to go and look for it myself. I want to see how other nations deal with the same sort of thing."

"I don't think you would find it, my boy. They haven't reached the point in America; and Europe—the civilized part of it—is rather tired and sophisticated. You might find something of the sort in Russia, even in Japan. But in Japan they wouldn't let you into the secret. If any nation were producing big original first-rate art in any form, it would be different; indeed on the whole, for all our Philistinism and cramped conventions, I think we are doing as well in England as in any nation—but in England it isn't

done by sets, but by individuals. The truth is, Walter, that a good many more people than you think have ideas of this kind, only like you they are ashamed to talk about them."

"Well, what am I to do then?"

"I think you had better go off abroad and see if you can get hold of something. I don't know, to speak very frankly, whether you have quite the right kind of gumption. On the whole, I rather wish you had to earn your living at once."

"You don't think anything of my solitary raptures?"

"I should think more of them if there was anything in particular that you wanted to do, paint, write, make music. You seem to me to be rather on the loose, mentally and emotionally."

"Yes, I think that is quite fair—it's like little Tommy head-in-air, in Struwelpeter. I'm not sure it isn't your fault for making me work so hard."

"Then I shall say that if you had this magnificent programme, you were rather an ass to be so docile."

"Well, will you deal with my father?"

"Of course."

Norton had a long conversation with the Squire on the following day. He said nothing about Walter's visions. He merely said that he had been overworking and that he needed an entire change. He then expatiated on the advantage of having a cosmopolitan view of things.

The Squire had fortunately, in his younger days, spent six months in Paris. He came round sharply into the wind, and said that he had himself been immensely the gainer by the sojourn. "I don't know," he went on, "if you have ever come much in the way of what we may call County society, Mr. Norton? My neighbours, the men I meet on public occasions, are excellent fellows, no doubt;

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but they have no idea of grappling with a social situation. They are apt on public occasions to stand in rows with their hands crossed in front of them. It is pitiable. I myself have cultivated the habit, I am told with some success, of speaking instantly and courteously to anyone high or low, whether stranger or acquaintance, that I find myself in contact with. I am told, and I have reason to believe, that this is of real service in bringing about, in radiating, if I may borrow a word which I have heard used in connection with the particular phenomenon, a certain social animation, a human sympathy, without which it is difficult for the wheels of our complex social machine to work smoothly." The Squire paused for encouragement, and Norton said:

"I can only judge from my own experience, Squire, and from what I have seen at this house; but I must say that I think you possess in a marked degree the rare gift of reassuring your circle."

"You are very good," cried the Squire, "to reassure me thus! Even a humble landowner like myself becomes aware that his position does to a certain degree isolate him. He is surrounded by what I will call, without any moral or intellectual implication, his inferiors. It is of the highest importance that Walter should develop this confidence. Observant and attentive as he is, I venture to say that I have noticed in his unconsidered remarks a certain brusquerie, a lack of suavity, which Parisian society would do much to correct."

"Then I hope," said Norton very craftily, "that I have rightly interpreted and confirmed the decision that you had already practically formed; and if I may say so, I am grateful to you for making it so easy to give a perfectly unbiassed opinion."

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"You are quite right," said the Squire. "My own impression was that a period of continental travel was the very thing for Walter, much as we shall miss him; and I am greatly gratified that one who knows our dear boy's character so well as yourself should have come without any hint from myself to the same conclusion. You have no anxiety, I hope, that he, inexperienced as he is, may deviate in any way from the strict morality his mother and I have always inculcated, by example more than by precept?"

"None whatever," said Norton. "There are few of my pupils about whom I could speak so confidently."

"There is one other thing," said the Squire. "What sum of money, do you think, will be necessary to give him the full advantages of a Continental tour?"

"If I were in your place," said Norton, "I should give him £800, and ask him not to be extravagant. I think he should feel entirely at ease about money on an occasion like this."

"I entirely approve," said the Squire; "there need be no difficulty about money. I wish him to mix in any society without any sense of being at a disadvantage. You are sure this will suffice?"

"Yes," said Norton; "it is a generous allowance, and it should give him a year of travel without any need for petty economy."

"That is precisely what I desire, Mr. Norton," said the Squire.

Walter returned to Norton from an interview with his father in a state of bewilderment and delight. "You are a magician," he said. "I am to have a year, and £800 to do it on. I shall be able to travel like a prince."

"I hope you won't chuck it about," said Norton; "that

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would be idiotic. I shouldn't go to smart hotels—you don't get your money's worth. But you will be able to do a little entertaining, if you want, and perhaps to go to some places to which the ordinary tourist finds it difficult to penetrate."

"My mother is rather wretched at the idea of my being away for so long," said Walter. "But my father will make that all right. I shall be off as soon as I can. You must give me some hints."

"I should go to France first," said Norton, "and spend a month in a family learning to chatter in French. With that and English you can get pretty nearly anywhere."

"How *did* you manage it?" said Walter.

"A little harmless diplomacy," said Norton. "I assumed that it was your father's own idea."

VIII

NORTON had departed before Mrs. Goring's luncheon could take place, but though she had heard of his departure she asked Walter to come to luncheon and to bring his friend. This was favourably regarded by the Squire as a praiseworthy attempt to help to entertain his guest, as well as a respectful recognition of the honour of which the Gorings had been the recipient. In addition Mrs. Goring asked Mr. Selden, the pleasant but not highly intellectual Vicar of an adjoining parish, with his wife.

"As soon as luncheon is over, William, you must take Mr. Selden to see the garden and the Church," she said. "They always stay rather too long, the Seldens, poor things; but they must be as dull as ditchwater at Pogbourne. You must be responsible for him."

"But I have nothing in common with Selden, dear. He is entirely absorbed in agriculture and Church promotion, and I know nothing about either."

"You must consult him about something in the church; ask his advice about moving the organ."

"But I have no intention of moving the organ. Indeed, there is nowhere else that it can go."

"So much the better! It will give Mr. Selden something to think about. Meanwhile I shall have a good gossip with Mrs. Selden. I am going to give the two children a clear field."

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"I don't quite like your planning this all out. Oughtn't these things to come spontaneously?"

"I know you think that marriages are made in heaven, but the foundations have to be laid on earth. Walter isn't one of those boys that can flirt and chatter at a lawn-tennis party. He would think it indecent."

"I'm afraid I think so too, dear."

"Walter is a *tête-à-tête* talker, William, like you, and requires time. Where would you and I have been if I hadn't taken you out that walk to Mountfield?"

"But I didn't flirt."

"No, you talked about the Revision of the Prayer Book, I remember. But I knew what you were up to!"

The Vicar held up his hands in horror, and drifted out of the room.

On the day of the feast, Mrs. Goring felt like Napoleon on the eve of a campaign. The Vicar was depressed at the house being turned topsy-turvy, as he said, though no particular change was visible; but still more at the thought of having to give his undivided attention to Mr. Selden. In fact, he spent some time in the morning in turning over the pages of a Church History, in the hope that he might light on some suitable topics of conversation.

Fortunately for Mrs. Goring's plans, Walter was the first to arrive. "I'm afraid we have got a very dull party for you, Walter!" she said. "Mr. and Mrs. Selden are coming, and I have asked that nice girl whom I met at your house, Miss Worsley. The Vicar thought she was very shy, and as she has now got to run her father's house, I thought I would give her a little practice. You must promise to be kind to her."

Walter, who had been anticipating the party with con-

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siderable gloom, felt the air filled with a sudden brightness. He had found Helen Worsley singularly attractive, and he had been puzzling his head vaguely without any practical result, devising schemes to meet her.

"I think she is quite capable of looking after herself," he said. "I found her very easy to talk to the other day."

"Ah, that is the effect shyness has upon some people. It makes them desperate. When I was a girl I used to chatter like a parrot to strangers with a sense of inner misery; and then I used to be found fault with for being so forward."

The Seldens made their appearance, and with a mysterious nod and smile to Walter, Mrs. Goring took them in tow. Mr. Goring came in, in obvious heaviness of spirit, and the talk became highly parochial. Mrs. Selden was bursting with information about the illness of one of their chief parishioners, a farmer. "He has to have a water-bed after all," she said triumphantly. "I told Mrs. Janeway that it would come to that, but people are so superstitious about not recognizing that an illness is to be a long one. There's nothing like preparing for the worst."

"No, no," said Mrs. Goring, "let us be cheerful while we can. I always dislike the line of the hymn '*Live each day as if thy last*'; think of the dismal condition to which we should be reduced if we all did that! Why, it wouldn't even be proper to have a little luncheon-party! We should all be on our knees in our bedrooms, and what should we feel like then? Mr. Selden would not be able to tell us about the crops and even William would be vexed at missing his game of picquet."

"I am sure the writer of the hymn in question didn't mean anything like that, Mrs. Goring," said Mr. Selden, a solid man with a complexion like a ripe plum. "I have

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always held it to refer to the punctual performance of daily duties. What do you think, Goring?"

"I believe that a resigned cheerfulness is indicated," said Mr. Goring, with an air of profound gloom. "It is a warning against the thoughtless jollity which makes havoc of our serious intentions."

"Well, we must resign ourselves to a little cheerfulness for the next hour or two," said Mrs. Goring, "and it will be all the nobler if we do it against the grain."

At this moment Helen came lightly into the room, treading like a nymph of Botticelli. She caught Walter's eye, and one of those little viewless messages of welcoming delight seemed to flash between them. Mrs. Goring embraced her and presented her to the Seldens. Mrs. Selden was happy to meet her—she represented a new channel of attractive gossip. Mr. Selden, who was of an amorous type, made a little bow and turned a darker shade of roseate purple.

"You find us all very serious, Helen," said Mrs. Goring, "thinking of the vanity of human hopes."

"Does that mean that I am late?" said Helen. "I have a very good excuse; but as no one would believe it, I won't mention it."

"You would find us all very credulous," said Mr. Selden.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Goring. "I know exactly the sort of excuse Helen means. Not an excuse, but a chain of unfortunate facts; like the long story which the Archdeacon would tell William on the doorstep at Bidborough when the Bishop was waiting in his carriage to take the Archdeacon to the station."

"The Archdeacon is far too confidential," said Mr. Goring.

"Did you hear that the Archdeacon was thought of for

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the Deanery of Carlisle?" said Mr. Selden. "I know for a fact that his name was before the Premier; I should not consider him at all a suitable man. I agree with Goring. The Archdeacon is not discreet. He is very far from discreet."

Luncheon was now announced; and Walter found to his vexation that he was between Mrs. Goring and Mrs. Selden, while Helen was between Mr. Goring and Mr. Selden. Mrs. Goring however, moved by her William's piteous aspect, kept the talk general. She asked Mr. Selden what changes and appointments would be made upon the Bench in case of the Archbishop's death. Mr. Selden propounded no less than three alternative schemes, and when he seemed inclined to prolong the discussion, Mrs. Goring said that she couldn't bear to hear more—she was growing envious, as it did not appear that however the cards were shuffled, either her dear William or Mr. Selden himself had any chance of being appointed to a Bishopric; and she switched the conversation on to Mrs. Selden, by asking her to tell them what the Duchess had really said to Lady Jane Fisher when she opened the Bidborough Bazaar. Mrs. Selden had heard so many versions of the story, that Mrs. Goring said they could only decide on which was the most likely, and that they were obliged, considering what the Duchess was, to select the most disagreeable.

By this time Mr. Goring was in a state of deep moral disapproval, and Mrs. Goring asked Helen whether it was true that her father, after her success at Cressage Garnet, had decided that it was necessary that she should be presented at Court—to which Helen replied that it was the other way. That her father had been thinking of getting her presented at Court, but that now he no longer thought it necessary. Mr. Selden did not feel sure that it would be respectful

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to laugh at this, but said with a Gargantuan archness, "Why not both, Miss Helen?"

However, to Walter's huge relief, luncheon, which to his sensitive imagination seemed to have lasted for several hours, suddenly ended with a kind of snap. The Vicar carried off Selden to look at something in the Church. Mrs. Goring and Mrs. Selden settled down over some coffee to a rich gossip. "Don't mind us," said Mrs. Goring to Walter, waving a valedictory hand. "We are going to discuss the peccadilloes of our respective flocks and the ineffective methods of our respective husbands. Take Helen out and show her something—young people have an extraordinary fondness for the open air; you might go up to the top of Aldon hill through the woods." Helen rose up blithely, and they hurried out together.

"Well, what did you think of *that* party?" said Walter. "You and I seem to be always 'like guilty creatures sitting at a play.'"

"I'm lost in admiration of Mrs. Goring," said Helen. "We were all just her marionettes; she pulled the strings and we danced."

"Well, we can pull our own strings now."

"I'm not so sure!"

"What do you mean by that?" said Walter.

"Don't be suspicious," said Helen. "I only mean that it was benevolence and not stupidity on Mrs. Goring's part. She thought we might have had enough of her play and would like one of our own."

"All your remarks are like nuts with a double kernel," said Walter.

"What do *you* mean by that?"

"Oh, not very much; but don't you know when people talk who interest you, you want to interrupt them every

moment. One thing I wanted to say was this: does it seem possible to you that you and I will ever talk like those people—using so many words to say what you don't want to say, and what nobody else wants to hear."

"Yes, I suppose we shall be like that," said Helen, musing. "But do you really think that it matters much what people say? Take my father—he always talks in the same sort of way, but I always know perfectly well whether he is pleased or displeased."

"Is he often displeased?" said Walter. "I should have thought he was a very successful and contented man."

"Yes, he seems so," said Helen, "and he is always good to me; but I think he is an ambitious man and hates always having to be polite and to agree with what his employers say. He would like to play first fiddle, instead of being always patronized."

"Now for the second question," said Walter. "You said, 'don't be suspicious'; do you think I am suspicious?"

Helen turned and surveyed him with a look of amusement. "I think that perhaps you are inclined to think people mean more than they say, but then you live with clever people. The people among whom I live say whatever words come into their heads, and mean something quite different."

"That must be rather confusing."

"Not if you watch people more than you listen to them. Now while you were sitting at lunch, I saw what you were thinking half the time."

They had left the lane they had been following, and had turned into a grassy path which wound up through the wood, a narrow path which brought them into closer proximity. Walter was strangely and suddenly affected by the nearness of this delicately made creature so close beside him, so fresh

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and fragrant, who stepped so lightly, smiled so responsively, and talked as if she had known him all her life. The girls he had met hitherto had seemed to him self-conscious and affected, incalculable creatures who seemed to be always expecting something. Helen seemed to expect nothing.

The trees closed in more and more about them. Walter holding back an insistent branch for Helen to pass, found her close to him, her breath almost on his cheek, her white teeth, her parted lips. He had an insane impulse to clasp her in his arms, but she passed by in smiling silence. He felt that he must say something to her, must feel sure of her. The next minute she was holding back a bough for him.

"On the whole I don't like a wood," said Helen in a matter-of-fact voice, "except to look at. It seems to me rather impertinent, and as if it didn't like being interrupted."

"We are nearly out," said Walter; "you can see the light through the trees."

A minute later they stepped out on to the turf of a bit of down, that ran up to an old grassy earthwork.

"This is lovely," said Helen; and then with a sudden cry of delight, "Oh, Mr. Garnet, do look here—you can see right down into the Vicarage garden—that's the top of the Church tower—and look, those two little things like beetles on the lawn are the two Vicars. I can see at this distance that Mr. Goring has nothing to talk about."

Walter laughed. "And look there—you can see the chimneys of our house—that's the gate-house. How superior it makes one feel to see human beings crawling about in their shut-in-valleys and gardens."

"And then there's the wide, wide world," said Helen, pointing to the plain. "But I'm not sure how much I like that; it is all rather too big for me. I think I prefer the two beetles. Look at Mr. Selden—he's telling off the

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points of what he is saying on his finger-tips. I'm sure he has got hold of a new arrangement about the Bishops. But just look at all these hills. I had no idea that there were all these little green mountains. What fun we might have, scrambling up them all."

They climbed up to the earthwork, and sat side by side surveying the scene.

"When do you go back to Oxford?" said Helen suddenly.

"Oxford?" said Walter. "Oh, I'm not going back there any more."

"Not going back?" said Helen. "Why, I thought you were to be Master of your College or something."

"No, I am going abroad—almost immediately."

"It must be horrid to be suddenly torn away from all your friends."

"No, I have very few friends. Norton is really almost the only one I ever want to see again."

Helen was silent for a moment, considering Walter seriously—his eyes fell before hers.

"You surely don't mean that?" she said at last.

"Yes, I do; does it surprise you?"

"Why, yes," said Helen. "I thought that the reason perhaps why you made so few friends down here was because you had so many much nicer ones at Oxford."

"There's only one person here I want to make friends with," said Walter rather clumsily. "No, I'm not going to say anything silly; I really want a friend very much. I seem to have so much I want to say and so many questions I want to ask; but the moment I get to that point with any of my Oxford friends, they seem to freeze up."

But Helen was silent and wore a somewhat troubled air.

"Please don't look at me like that," said Walter. "I haven't said anything absurd, have I?"

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"Absurd? No, of course not," said Helen; "but you have taken me so much by surprise. You see, I have been brought up to regard the Manor as the last word in—what shall I say?—exclusiveness. And then we hear of you at Oxford carrying all before you; and then I meet you and find you quite nice, and then this fairy prince suddenly says that he hasn't any friends, and wants me to step in. It's too much like Cophetua and the beggar-maid. I have always thought very meanly of the beggar-maid. What business had she to take up at once with that pursy old King? She couldn't have had time to think whether she cared about him."

"Yes," said Walter; "but it isn't in the least like Cophetua and the beggar-maid. It's too bad to make us all out to be ogres, and then to say you couldn't have anything to do with an ogre. It is just the other way round. You have ever so many more reasons for enjoying life than I have, and I only want you to give me something of which I am in very great need—and which you can give."

"But it is much more serious and difficult for me than for you," said Helen. "I hardly know you—you hardly know me. We aren't by way of meeting often; how can we meet, as things are? I can't make a serious sort of compact like this offhand."

"No," said Walter. "I see that. I shouldn't have sprung it on you if I hadn't been going away. But you seemed to me the moment I met you to be just the one sort of friend I wanted—who would understand things and be amused by them, not want everything explained, or wish to be made a fuss of."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Helen.

"Oh, you know what I mean," said Walter. "But what you don't know—and it is very awkward for me to tell you

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—is the way in which my people consider all the girls I see; and the relief is to find someone who hasn't got all these stuffy ideas. . . . I'm putting all this very badly, I know, but I'm too much in earnest about it all; I can't bear to miss this great chance."

"I certainly never thought I should have to feel sorry for you," said Helen, "and I'll go in blindfold—but mind, it *is* blindfold; and we are both free to back out if it doesn't fit."

She put her hand lightly into his and gave it a little soft pressure.

Then she went on lightly: "Good Heavens, what have I done? I feel as if I must at once begin a serious course of reading. What is your line at Oxford?"

"Oh, philosophy and so on."

"Would it be of any use to read up a book in our School-room called *Philosophy in Sport*? It's a dreadful sort of story. The unhappy boy opens the door and is told he has been employing a lever and has it all explained to him with diagrams."

"Oh, don't make fun of me," said Walter in a melancholy tone.

"I won't," said Helen, "though I thought that humour was one of my three charms, or was it only two? You will very soon be repenting of our bargain, you will see."

"You wouldn't laugh if you knew what a different person will go down the hill from the person who came up it!"

"That is like Jack and Jill. Is the water spilt already? But mercy, look at the time—it's four o'clock. When does the luncheon-party stop?"

"When it becomes a tea-party," said Walter. They raced down the hill. "May I write to you from abroad?" he said.

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"Certainly not."

"But we must do something."

"We must love one another," said Helen. "Well, you might write *once*—but I must think about that. The post-office is the centre of village gossip. You have made me feel very clandestine."

"I may call you Helen?"

"I don't suppose I can prevent you."

"And you will call me Walter?"

"Not yet—I must get used to all these glories. Oh dear, I am afraid I have been very rash!"

"Helen!"

"How curious it sounds!"

They found Mrs. Goring at tea. "What on earth has been happening, Walter?" she said.

"Only three words and a view," said Walter.

"The right words, I hope?" said Mrs. Goring.

"Mr. Garnet has been explaining the view to me," said Helen; "he pointed out the Manor chimney."

"That was very unselfish," said Mrs. Goring. "But now that you are here, I must just ask if you are staying for dinner? I have sent your car away once, Helen. But here it is coming up the drive."

Helen was packed in, and Mrs. Goring was tactful enough to let the two say their good-bye unobserved. "I hope you have had a better afternoon than I have," she said to Walter. "That good woman has stuck me as full of gossip as a pin-cushion of pins. William is lying down, reading *Thomas à Kempis*. I suggested *Punch* in vain. Don't disturb him. I heard *Thomas à Kempis* fall on the floor half an hour ago."

IX

THE MANOR HOUSE, GRESSAGE GARNET.

M^R DEAR HELEN,—

Ever since I parted from you, I have been wondering at my own courage, and wondering too if you think that what I said to you was very pushing and impertinent. But the fact that I did speak, and that you didn't snub me or even say no, far outweighs any of those slow blushes which invade and take possession of my face—you know the kind—or perhaps you don't know them—which seem to start from a very long way off, and yet can't be stopped or delayed. But why should I blush, you may think? What have I done to be ashamed of, except stretch out a hand like a drowning man to someone smiling on the bank.

But still I feel that I have got to justify myself for doing as I did, and to prove that I have not taken an unfair advantage. Of course it would have been more comfortable to have made friends in a deliberate and conventional way. But then the chances were against our meeting, and I am a bad hand at making opportunities. As it is I am only too thankful that we met just those two times, and that I saw at once that you were the one person in the world who could help me, if you chose to.

I can't write a long autobiography, but the main points are these. I have been brought up, with the best intentions, in

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cotton wool, by two beloved people to whom I am much devoted, and whom it seems almost ungrateful to criticize. But they have been so preoccupied with keeping all the evil and second-rate and hurtful things away from me, that they excluded, without knowing it, all or most of the best things too. Much as they would have liked an omelette, they dared not break the eggs. And then I was sent to school on my guard against all sorts of impossible contingencies, and charged not to make friends too easily, and not to take up with any boy whom I thought my parents might not wish me to know.

Of course a more vigorous and healthy-minded boy wouldn't have troubled his head about it, but I had this dreadful ideal of superiority always before my mind—not to give myself away, not to make myself cheap, to make a secret of everything. My father has many little maxims—not to talk about money, not to talk about health, never to say where you are going or where you have been, never to show emotion—all good practical rules in a general way, when directed against the possibility of becoming a chattering egotist, but crushing and cramping rules if you don't know when to break them.

Things were easier for me at Oxford, when I became less cautious and suspicious; but I had lost or not acquired the knack of easy friendship, though I made a good number of casual friends, and one great friend—Norton.

And then I worked too hard—why, I don't know. Probably because it was a way of passing the time, and a good deal to please Norton.

Then last term I had a strong fit of general disgust. I hated my work, I hated the endless silly talk about games and the stupid rather ill-natured College gossip. I felt I had made a great mess of it all by being so fastidious and contemptuous and narrow-minded—and there seemed to me to be a big and free sort of world outside, of kind and sensible people, who

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were not ashamed as I was to care for each other in a generous sort of way, and to take an even greater interest in other people's concerns than in their own.

And then, you know, we met. And I seemed to see in you someone full of freshness and good nature, not going by stuffy principles, but taking things and people as they came. And it came over me like a flash that you might help me—I wasn't thinking of you as someone that might only amuse and interest myself, but as someone who might really open a door into the world of live people and happy ideas and outspoken friendships.

All this was what I wanted to say to you, and you know how badly I said it. But you seemed willing to help, though of course I don't want any compact, nor do I claim your whole attention, nor do I want to bind you to anything you don't like.

Norton is to go out with me, and in a day or two I am going to bury myself in a French family in a little Cathedral town and learn to chatter in French. Then I shall go on to Italy—but I'm not a great sight-seer. I like romantic and beautiful places; but I am really going to look out for people.

Tell me exactly what you wish about my writing, and don't feel bound to write yourself unless you are inclined.

Your grateful friend,

WALTER GARNET.

MY DEAR WALTER (though I feel it rather presuming to write thus to a distinguished young man whom I have met three times in my life, and one of those times you don't even remember),—

I was very glad to get your letter, and understand better than I did. But I am rather alarmed, because you are crediting me with all sorts of things I don't possess, and you

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will soon knock your head against the bottom of my very shallow little mind, if you have not done so already.

Is there really anything I can give you, Walter, which you don't already possess? You don't know in what a poky world I live, and you would be shocked at some of the girls and young men who are really very good friends of mine. But I haven't any wish to rise in the world. What I see of it seems to me quite delightful and exciting enough. But of course I shall be glad to be of use in any way, and I felt very sad at what you told me about your school and College. The whole thing is at present a complete surprise to me! I thought you had everything in the world you could possibly want, and were floating on the surface quite above all cares and anxieties. But I suppose after all that a house like the Manor, and plenty of money, and the kind of magnificent manners that you and your family have, only keep certain tiresome things away—they don't give you the sort of things that on the whole you can't do without—quarrels and makings-up and worries and people who have to be smoothed down. I am always having to behave nicely to people whom I think absurd and even hateful. But I think even that is rather useful, because I have got to do it whether I like it or not, and I suppose you seldom have to. But, oh dear me, I feel that my reflections on life in general are very thin indeed, and I had better hold my tongue.

I had a fine fencing-match with dear Mrs. Goring the next day. She was dying to know what we had talked about, and I was quite as determined that she should not know. It came to this—that you were so fearfully clever that you wanted some rather stupid and commonplace friends like herself and me. Mrs. Goring is a person I really admire. She has a tiresome and particular husband, and she not only makes the best of him, but he is frantically devoted to her. And out of three

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farmers' wives and the village schoolmaster and her own housemaid she makes a sort of play like Hamlet, and acts it with all her might. She really does get some fun out of things. And then she isn't ashamed of making mistakes, and she hasn't any sorrows as most of the elderly ladies I know have. I think only very good people can afford to have sorrows, and then they keep them to themselves.

What a lot of nonsense I have written, to be sure, though it has been for me a severe intellectual effort, but I can't expect you to recognize that.

About writing, I must consider; I think we must stoop to some deception. If I get a series of foreign letters in your refined Oxford handwriting, we shall soon get into trouble. You don't know how minutely everything is observed and discussed here. I hate making a secret of anything, but one can't help it sometimes.

*Your rather timid friend,
HELEN WORSLEY.*

BOOK II

I

IT was at Florence in the following March, when Walter had been six months abroad, that he received a telegram summoning him home because of his father's serious illness; and a second telegram, an hour later, told him that the Squire was dead. Somehow it seemed to him the very last possibility he had ever imagined. The Squire was so much the central figure of his home, everyone had so deferred to his wishes, life had been so regulated, down to the very smallest details, in accordance with his preferences, that the possibility of a sudden termination of this unquestioned supremacy had never even crossed Walter's mind. As far as he himself had been concerned, though the Squire had been an indulgent and indeed devoted father, Walter had never felt *near* him in any sense of the word. He had never confided anything to him, nor had his father ever talked to him other than in full dress, arrayed in the panoply of elaborate courtesy and distinguished consideration with which he repelled all the intrusions of humanity. Walter had no idea what his father thought on any matter, except that he was an ardent lover of the established order, and had a pervading sense of his own importance. Indeed, such was his instinctive deference, that he hardly thought of his father as having been compelled, possibly against his will, to die. He rather accepted his death as he would have accepted any decisive step that his father might take, as the deliberate outcome of an inscrutable and unquestionable will.

But where the catastrophe touched him with a deep sense of mystery, and even cruelty, was in the thought of how it would affect his mother. Walter had a passionate instinctive love of his mother. He knew that, next to his father, he was the one human being to whom she was absolutely devoted; and her whole life had been so faithfully spent in executing and if possible anticipating his father's wishes, and in admiring the Squire's magnificent disdain for all persons and opinions other than his own, that Walter realized how desperate her suffering must be.

He had spent a very happy six months abroad, with a great sense of novelty and freedom. He had made some friends; but he had not found, as he had hoped to do, that the world was thickly peopled by men and women of large and generous ideals. He had heard constantly from his mother, hardly at all from his father, whose dislike of letter-writing was intensified by the fact that he had so little to communicate; and he had kept up a correspondence of growing ease and naturalness with Helen, with very little admixture of personal sentiment, for which indeed Helen had frankly admitted that she was disinclined. But though he did not confess it even to himself, his attachment to Helen had grown and deepened every month. She seemed to stand for the reasonableness, the good nature, the frank kindliness of the world, and he had become more and more aware that though she seemed to treat most things from a light and humorous standpoint, her generosity was of a kind that only needed an occasion to evoke it, and that there was probably hardly any limit to the unselfish sacrifices that she was prepared to make for anyone for whom she truly cared. Indeed, the one bright spot about his return,—though he thrust it from him almost with a sense of anger, whenever it flashed across him—was the thought that he would see

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Helen face to face, and listen to the clear tones of her eager voice.

To the difference in his own position he hardly gave a thought. He imagined his mother as continuing to reign at the Manor, and only dimly perceived that he would himself have a wider choice of action. He had thought of his future as being more or less at his father's disposal; now he would be able to follow his own desires; but at the moment, the thought of any life at all apart from his father's majestic presence and approval, seemed like dust and ashes to him.

He arrived at Cressage in the morning, just in time for the funeral, and his mother's cry of happiness as she folded him in her arms almost broke him down. But there was little time for talk. He just learned from her that at an early hour of the morning his father had cried out faintly, that she had found him in great pain, but conscious. "He thanked me," the poor woman said, "just in his old way, and it seemed to me that there was something particular that he wished to say to me." But the pain had returned, and he had breathed his last before the doctor arrived.

There were two or three relations in the house whom Walter could just remember to have seen; but the obscurity of their appearance and the formality of their behaviour gave him a painful impression. His mother struggled with pathetic desperation to have everything done with the solemnity and decorum of which the Squire would have approved. At the luncheon which took place, at which one or two neighbouring landowners and their wives were present, she sat dry-eyed and pinched at the head of the table, tasting nothing, but patiently endeavouring to say something pleasant to the mute and dreary guests. It seemed to Walter the most inexcusable ceremony he had

ever seen. The only bright spot was Mrs. Goring, to whom Mrs. Garnet turned like a child for assistance, and who never left his mother's side. At the funeral which followed, in the little Church, they were joined by Mr. Worsley, who looked to Walter singularly grave and pre-occupied. The only sincere grief manifested was that shown by the tenants and villagers, a few of whom spoke to Walter in accents of profound affliction, the conventional phrase, pronounced each time with a genuine personal conviction, being that they would not soon look upon his father's like again.

The whole pageant seemed to Walter, who had never seen a funeral at close quarters before, to be wholly appalling and horrifying, as if designed to bring home to mortals the surest possible evidence of their mortality and extinction. Walter could not conceive of his father as being adapted to any sort of existence but that which he had just quitted—as an owner of land by ancient tenure, and as an aristocrat of unquestioned superiority; but to think of his father as a disembodied spiritual presence seemed as unimaginable as the idea of seeing him without his clothes.

Mrs. Garnet insisted on shaking hands with everyone who had been present. The groups melted away. Mrs. Goring came back with them to the house; the relatives excused themselves, and fled in haste.

Only one somewhat sinister event occurred. When Mr. Worsley had shaken hands with Mrs. Garnet, he drew Walter aside, and said, "Mr. Walter, the sooner a distressing thing can be dealt with, the better. There will be a good deal of troublesome business for you to do, and some anxious decisions to make. I would of course gladly come to the Manor, but I have all your father's papers in my safe, and I think it would be better for you to come down to me

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as early as you can to-morrow, and I will hold myself at your disposal for the entire day. You and I are the executors of your father's will."

Walter felt a vague alarm at the words in which Mr. Worsley made his communication, and this was increased by the discomfort and anxiety of the lawyer's manner. He said that he would come down early to the office, and Mrs. Goring eagerly promised to keep Mrs. Garnet company. The evening was the most tragic that Walter had ever spent. His mother's self-control quite gave way. She told Walter that his father's health had been failing all through the winter, but that he insisted that no word of it should be sent to Walter. Of late he had been much preoccupied with business, and Mr. Worsley had been often with him. She went on to say that his father had constantly talked of Walter's marriage, and had even mentioned certain county families with whom he would not disdain to be allied. "He was very anxious," she said, "that when you came home, you should pay some county visits. He said he was afraid we had perhaps kept you too much to ourselves. But he often said what a good son you had been; and oh, Walter dearest," said poor Mrs. Garnet, clasping him close to her, "I do so want you to follow your dearest father's wishes in every respect, and to take exactly the high line in the county he always took." The poor lady went on to accuse herself of having often failed in her duty in this respect. "Your father never said an unkind word to me; but I know that he sometimes thought me too familiar with people, and not distant enough in dealing with them. My own natural feeling is that of wishing everyone to be happy and comfortable; but I see now that people in our position have to set an example as well. It is so easy to forget that we are so much looked

up to." Walter did his best, in an agony of pity and affection, to assure his mother that she had been all that his father desired, and had given her life up to securing his happiness. "Oh, the trouble didn't matter, darling," said the poor widow, "that was my place, and I really enjoyed it; but I know I wasn't his idea quite of a great lady, and I sometimes think it was that which kept him back from going so much into society, for there was no one who was so much respected and sought after as he was."

Those hours seemed to forge a new link in the chain which bound the two together. Walter was really amazed at the depth of innocence, humility, and devotion that could exist so freshly in an elder woman's mind. It seemed to him strangely beautiful. He had himself viewed his father respectfully and uncritically, but he became aware now how much all along he had preferred his mother's simple and kindly handling of life to his father's spotless dignity; for Walter had become aware at school and college that, though ancient descent and an old landed estate were regarded as agreeable adjuncts to life, and even respected, yet that the younger generation reserved its deepest admiration for people who enjoyed all advantages and distinctions, whether gained or inherited, with a modest indifference, and resented any ostentatious flourish of them in the eyes of the less fortunate.

That night Walter spent in his father's dressing-room, and had his first knowledge of desperate grief, in the helpless sobbing and even wailing from his mother's room, which at dead hours of night roused him, tired as he was. Half a dozen times he went to kneel beside her bed, to kiss and comfort her. And when at last the grey dawn came in, and the old butler, haggard with grief and astonishment appeared to call him, the sight of all his father's precise

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arrangements and toilet devices gave him his first bitter taste of the hideous interruption of death.

He rode down early to Mr. Worsley's, leaving his mother in Mrs. Goring's care. He had a few words with that brave and good woman, who asked whether she might not come and stay in the house for the next few days. "Your dear mother is utterly adrift," she said. "How could it be otherwise?—and I think she wants a woman with her—though that you should be at hand is her greatest comfort. My William, with the best will in the world, is no good on these occasions. He will be able to help her later on, but he has no power of comforting people. I think if I died, he might very likely die too; but while he lived, he would snap anyone's head off who tried to comfort him—he would think it unmanly."

She gave him a kiss. "Poor dear boy," she said, "it is awful for you, I know; but now we must think of nothing but your dear mother. It isn't only that your father is dead—it is that her whole occupation is gone."

Walter rode down to Mr. Worsley's office, which was a large room, lighted only from the back, built on to the handsome old red-brick house, a miniature mansion, which Mr. Worsley occupied in one of the quieter streets of Thurston. The room looked out on the garden. In spite of his anxious preoccupation, Walter's recurring wonder was whether he would see Helen, or if he would dare to ask to see her.

He went in at the front door, which admitted to a little hall with pillars, paved with black and white marble. As he entered the hall, Helen came forward quickly from a room at the side. "My father is waiting for you in the office," she said, holding out her hand. "Will you come in here

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for a moment?" She led the way into a high panelled room with one window—a rather precise and austere-looking place. "This is my own room," said Helen; and then she took his hand in both her own and said, "Oh, Walter, I am so sorry for you." Walter bent and kissed her hand.

"I must get a few words with you sometime to-day," he said; "the only happy thing about coming home was the thought that I should see you."

"Oh, I'll contrive something," said Helen; "the worst of this place is that there are so many people about. I wish you didn't look so tired," she added, putting her hand on his arm. Then she led the way across the hall, and down a flagged passage to her father's sanctum.

II

AS soon as the door had closed behind her, Mr. Worsley, who had risen to shake hands with Walter, and showed signs, in his pallor and fatigue of demeanour, of great agitation, said with a hurried abruptness, "Mr. Walter, I have to break to you the fact that instead of dying a rich man, as you perhaps were led to suppose would be the case, your father died a poor man; I will state the facts first and give the explanations afterwards. Forgive me if I use no circumlocution. Your mother is assured of £500 a year by a separate trust. Beyond that what is left of the estate can hardly bring in more than £300 a year, if that. The house is yours, of course, and the furniture; but that is practically all."

The announcement fell upon Walter's ears as a very great and painful shock, though at first he hardly estimated what the practical effect would be. He had been brought up to be not exactly careless of money, but money had always been available for every reasonable need. Moreover, his father had always spoken as if he were not only a wealthy man, but possessed of far larger resources than he needed, which were accumulating in his hands, for Walter's future enrichment.

But at the same time Walter suddenly and unexpectedly found his courage rising to meet the news. It seemed to him clear that his mother would at all events be able to live in some degree of comfort; but even so, he had

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no idea what the cost of living as they had always lived would be.

"I am afraid," he said slowly, "that I do not understand how this can be. My father always spoke of himself as a wealthy man, and I have always had whatever I wanted in the way of money. Is this a recent loss? Did my father know the condition of affairs?"

"You have every right to ask," said Mr. Worsley. "But you know what your father was—he was masterful, and in matters of business impatient. When he came of age he had a clear income of some £3,000 a year. He never, except quite lately, spent less—often a good deal more. I have myself had the care of his affairs for over twenty years; when I became fully acquainted with the position of things, I pointed out to him very plainly what was happening. But he would never so much as look into the figures. He would say very courteously that he required so much money, and he would leave it to me to take the necessary steps to raise it. All the farms are mortgaged, and, as you may know, all the outlying portions of the estate have been sold. I can only say that I did my best in every case to secure favourable terms for him, and I had better add at once that my own firm holds the mortgages on the Cressage estate; but if you propose to look into the accounts, you will see that all along we gave your father terms which he could not have obtained in the open market."

"But why did my father always speak as if everything were so prosperous?" said Walter.

"Again, I can only say that you know what your father was. He was a proud man, and it was humiliating to him to think that he was in any way pressed for money. He knew that the estate had been a good one, and in these later years he lived more economically. His invariable phrase

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was 'Ah, I see that it is all coming out right,' and no words of mine could convince him of the contrary."

"But," said Walter, "ought not *someone* to have been informed of this? It seems very unfair on my mother, and even on myself, that we should have been almost encouraged to spend money which really was not there."

"Yes," said Mr. Worsley becoming grave and pale. "I sympathize with that feeling, and see that you may think you have reason to blame me. But your father again was peremptory on this point. He would brook no sort of interference; and when I once ventured to press that very point, he said that he would regret to put his business affairs into other hands, but he would be compelled to do so if criticisms were offered which he did not specifically ask for."

Mr. Worsley then produced a clear and simple statement of the accounts, and showed Walter how the debts had gradually increased. Much had been incurred through the elaborate restoration of the house. It was a pitiful record. But one fact emerged very clearly, that Mr. Worsley had managed everything very strictly and economically, not only with scrupulous care, but with very little profit to his firm. Walter said something to this effect. Mr. Worsley grasped his hand in silence and said, "I must thank you from my heart, Mr. Walter, for saying this. The honour of your family has been very dear to me, and I will venture to say that, granted the painful secrecy enjoined on me, and granted also your father's temperament, which made him a difficult man to withstand or to influence, the very best has been done. I believe that I may say that if the business had not all been in our hands, your father would several years ago have been engulfed in hopeless ruin. That at least he has been spared. But I have felt

myself in a distressing position between my duty to your father as a client, and my earnest wish to protect the interests of your mother and yourself."

They then discussed what had better be done. Mr. Worsley was prepared with suggestions. He said that Mrs. Garnet must be persuaded if possible to move to a smaller house. "To live at Cressage with a reduced establishment would be nothing but a series of humiliating economies." He was prepared with an offer from his firm to purchase the whole estate, which would give Walter a sum of about £6,000 clear. "You cannot," he said, "by any economy, hope to clear off the mortgages, and moreover, the farms are in very bad repair. I may say honestly that I am sure that this is an offer which could not possibly be obtained in the open market; but you may wish, of course, to have an independent opinion on this point." He recommended that most of the furniture should be sold, and he went on to say that his firm would offer a further sum of £4,000 for the Manor House. "But this you may prefer to retain, and you might be able to find a tenant for it, though it is so inaccessible that there may be a difficulty in letting it." He pointed out that Mrs. Garnet would receive £500 a year from the Marriage Settlement Trust, which was intact; and that there would be in addition an income of about £300 a year. On this it would be possible for Mrs. Garnet and Walter to live quietly and comfortably.

"But I should advise," he said, "that you should not make any of the details known to Mrs. Garnet. She would be bewildered and distressed: I should venture to suggest that you should talk over the matter with Mrs. Goring, who is devotedly attached to your mother, and is a woman of strong practical common sense."

Walter agreed, and further said that he would go over

to Oxford, and consult a friend of his there as to what he could himself do to earn his living. "If I could get some work which would make me independent, so that I could add the income that falls to me to my mother's income, she might live in fair comfort. I think," he added, "that my mother's tastes are very simple, and I believe that she may be even happier in a small house, if she is not pinched for money, than with the care of a big one. What she will feel most is not the loss of dignity, but the fact that she was not fully in my father's confidence."

"I think, Mr. Walter," said Mr. Worsley, "you might say to her that one of his chief preoccupations had been to spare her any anxieties. That is at least consonant with the facts of the case, even though it may not cover the whole ground."

The morning was soon gone, and Mr. Worsley suggested that Walter should stay to luncheon, and should then take the papers away with him to see if there were any further details he would like to inquire into, and that they should meet again, possibly at the Manor, when Walter had had an opportunity of talking matters over with his mother and Mrs. Goring. The temptation to see Helen was too strong to be resisted, though he wanted to be alone to think the matter out. But what surprised Walter in his own feelings was that though he had learned this morning that he was a poor man instead of a rich one, though his blind confidence in his father's discretion and worldly wisdom had been entirely reversed, and though he anticipated an interview of a most distressing kind with his mother, yet his spirits seemed to have actually risen. He had a difficult and definite part to play, involving him in some humiliation, and he grappled to it with a sense that was almost pleasurable. If he had considered it beforehand, he would have expected

such an interview to have been an acutely painful one; but now that it had come, a sort of militant impulse flushed his veins with an unusual poignancy. He was face to face with realities at last.

Somehow or other the other members of the household—he knew that Helen had at least one younger sister—whom Walter had dreaded the idea of meeting, had been separately provided for. Walter sat down to lunch in a little panelled dining-room looking on the garden with Mr. Worsley and Helen, and he seemed to himself to be the least preoccupied of the three. He spoke of his mother, he talked a little of his travels. Mr. Worsley seemed inattentive and wearied, though his courtesy was elaborate; and Walter felt Helen's glance bent upon him with a questioning and tender regard, though she said little. Mr. Worsley was called away to see a client, and when he had apologetically vanished, Walter said, "Helen, can't we go and walk in the garden? I *must* have a few minutes' talk with you."

The trim garden at the back of the house was a high-walled sunny place; a lawn and shrubberies in front, a small kitchen-garden behind, beyond which was a stable. They walked to and fro on the lawn.

"Helen, I must tell you at once what has happened. My father—I don't know *what* I feel about him. I don't feel as though our life could exist without him, and he was wonderfully good to me. Yet I see, after what I have been hearing, that I never knew him. Is it very heartless to feel so?"

"Perhaps not," said Helen, looking at him with a veiled surprise.

"You thought perhaps," went on Walter, "that I should come away from my talk with your father, knowing myself to be a rich man, and with a little position of my own to

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take up? Well, it is just the other way. Cressage will have to be sold. My mother must live in a small house somewhere, and I must set about earning my living. It has all vanished away like smoke. I am a poor man and a nobody, and strange to say I don't feel aggrieved so far or humiliated—I daresay that will come."

Helen was standing still, open-eyed and pale, regarding him.

"What?" she said. "I don't understand. What has become of it all?"

"My father had it, and spent it, as he had a perfect right to do."

"Perhaps—if you and Mrs. Garnet had known it was so—but did you know, did you suspect? I call it very hard upon you both!"

"It was the way my father was made. He was a proud man, and shut his eyes to it all. I doubt if even he knew himself. He seemed to himself the one unshakable fact, part of the order of nature, rich as a matter of course."

"But did my father know and not speak?"

"Helen, your father has evidently done the very best for us all along. He was in a wretched position, knowing all and not permitted to say a word."

"He has been very miserable about something lately," said Helen. "I have never seen him so depressed and subdued."

"I don't wonder. It must have been awful having to tell me; but he has behaved very well."

"How *thankful* I am to hear you say that," said Helen. "But tell me—how is your mother?"

"She is what you would expect," said Walter, "—quite overwhelmed with grief—and yet she tries to think of everyone but herself, and even blames herself."

"Poor darling," said Helen, putting her hand to her eyes for a moment. "Do you think I might see her?—I think she is the kindest woman I know."

"I doubt if she will see anyone just now," said Walter, "except Mrs. Goring and myself. But I will tell her what you say, and she will be pleased anyhow."

"Not unless she wishes to see me, of course," said Helen. "And you—what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Oxford to see if I can find any way of earning my living."

"Oh, Walter," said Helen, stopping suddenly, "I am so dreadfully sorry for you; it must all be such a shock, but I think . . ."

"What do you think?"

"That you are behaving splendidly."

"You expected me to sit down and howl?"

"Of course not—but I didn't know—I thought you took all those things for granted."

At this moment Mr. Worsley came out to them. Somehow the little picture burnt itself into Walter's mind, the red-brick house with its white casements, the lawn, the decorous figure approaching; and close beside him Helen standing pale and tearful, with her hands clasped.

"I have been telling Miss Helen the exact position of affairs," said Walter to Mr. Worsley.

"Most kind, I am sure," said Mr. Worsley, "a much valued mark of confidence. It will go no further."

"But I wish it to go further," said Walter. "I don't wish any secret to be made of it. I would like everyone to know at once, rather than that they should gossip and suspect and speculate. It will save us all from many humiliations. Nothing can be gained by keeping it dark."

"Well," said Mr. Worsley slowly, "if you prefer it so,

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I will say that I think it *is* wiser. I trust I may be allowed to hint, if this is quite agreeable to you, that you have no reason to be dissatisfied with my handling of affairs? I do not wish to seem selfish or importunate, but this would be a relief to me as a professional man, sincerely devoted to the interests of my clients."

"Of course," said Walter, "that is just what I shall say myself."

He stopped, seeing that Helen's eyes were fixed upon her father with a sort of disdain.

"Miss Helen was kind enough to say that she would like to see my mother—and I think that in a day or two my mother might like to see her—she is very dependent on friendly sympathy. May I write and suggest it?"

"We shall be deeply honoured," said Mr. Worsley, in the old deferential manner. "If any of us can be of any use in helping to alleviate the grief of one whose kindness has won her so many devoted friends, it will be a pleasure—a mournful satisfaction"

III

WALTER'S interview with his mother proved far more distressing than he could have thought possible. He began by telling her that his father had left far less money than was expected. "Then some of it must have been concealed, or perhaps even taken from him," said Mrs. Garnet, "for he constantly told me that he hoped to leave you a very rich man."

"It isn't a question of concealing or losing it, mother," said Walter. "Papa often spent more than his income, and raised money on mortgages." Mrs. Garnet did not understand what was meant, and he spent some time in endeavouring to explain.

"Yes, that may be so," she said at length, "but he never parted with the land—so at all events there is that left for you." She was horrified at the idea of any part of it being sold. "Your father was very much attached to the old estate, and meant it all for you—and you see that must have been so; for if ever he needed money, as you say, he held on to the estate." At last, however, he made her understand. "What ever he did, dearest boy," she said, "it was all done for the best—for your sake and mine—promise me you will always believe that."

When it came to his suggesting that she should move into a smaller house, perhaps in Thurston, she offered no opposition. "I shall be quite happy in a little house, dear—I used to get very tired of all the housekeeping, and some-

times wished we had a quiet little house in the town with a couple of maids. Of course you will like to be by yourself here, and I shall often come up and see you. You are the Squire now, and your father would have wished you to have the house to yourself." Walter in vain protested and explained that he could not live at the Manor either. This was all a great grief and puzzle to Mrs. Garnet. But he promised at last that he would not sell the house, but would try to let it, just as it was. "Your father would not have minded that—he sometimes spoke to me of letting it—and you can arrange it so that when you are married, you can move in and settle down." Walter thought it best to leave matters alone, hoping that Mrs. Goring would be able to enlighten his mother. She ended by saying, "I think Mr. Worsley must have been careless, and must have given your father wrong advice. Your father depended very much on him, and I used latterly to feel, when Mr. Worsley came here, that there was something uncomfortable in the back of his mind."

"What made you think that, mother?"

"Oh, it was something in the way that he spoke and looked; but I won't blame him, if you don't, though I feel it might have been explained to me."

"That is what I said to Mr. Worsley myself," said Walter, "but it was my father's wish that he should say nothing to anyone; I think," he added, "that Mr. Worsley has taken great care of the property. It is he who has offered to buy it."

"Oh, Walter, then there *must* be something wrong! But we can be certain of this, can't we, that your father meant it all for the best, and intended you to have it all. You must not think that I shall be unhappy moving into Thurston. Indeed, I have been feeling that I couldn't live on here with your father gone."

He went on to tell her that he was going to Oxford, to consult Norton as to what he had better do to earn his living. This was another great shock to his mother. Walter could see that, for all her kindness, she differentiated sharply between the people who had to earn their income and the people who had only to spend it. "I hope you won't be forced to do that, dearest," she said. "Your father would not have liked that; he always felt that a landlord's first duty was to his tenants." "But if we sell the estate, mother, we shall have no tenants." He found that his mother was firmly under the impression that his father had been the best of landlords, and that the tenants would not be able to bear the idea of being the tenants of anyone out of the family. "These farmers and labourers here have been here all their lives, most of them, and their forbears before them," she said. "They are so proud of it, Walter; could you not keep on the estate, if only in name? It seems almost like telling one's relations to be the relations of someone else. They will all be miserable."

He found at last that it would really be a relief to her to get away from the house. "I keep on thinking, as I sit in my chair, that I hear your father's voice calling, or his step in the passage—or I think he may want something, and I get up in order to go and look in upon him—and then it all comes over me, and I remember that I shall never be able to do anything for him again."

Walter told her that Helen had sent her love, and had asked to see her. His mother's pinched and anxious face melted a little at this, and Walter saw that what she was pining for was love and comfort. "Did she say that?—Yes, I should like to see Helen—she is a dear girl. Your father said that you would hardly have known that she

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was only an attorney's daughter; he said she carried herself so nicely, and was so respectful."

That evening, when they were going to bed, his mother said to him: "You mustn't think too much of what I said to-day, dearest. Your father always said I did not understand business, and I must remember that you are master here now. You must not consult me; just tell me what you have done. You are such a comfort to me, and you are so much more like your father in the way that you decide everything just as he did. But you won't let the old house go, Walter? I can see it may be best for us to leave it for a little, till Mr. Worsley has been able to go more into the business—and I am sure it will all come right."

"No, mother darling," said Walter, kissing her, "the house shall not go, whatever happens."

Walter had a letter from Norton expressing sympathy. "I am sure that if I had been your father's son, I should have missed him horribly. The life of Cressage seemed built up round him, and he never forgot to be kind. It is dreadful to have to take someone's place. . . . I wish you would come and see me (or I would come and see you) and talk about your plans. I have something to suggest." Walter wired at once that he would come. Meanwhile it was agreed that Mrs. Goring should get some particulars of houses, and talk them over with Mrs. Garnet. "She wants something practical to occupy her mind," Mrs. Goring said. "She is sadly bewildered between her belief that your father could not have made a mistake, and her astonishment at what has actually happened; and most of all, she has been *wanted* at every hour of the day, and she now feels that she is not wanted by anyone. Only you can persuade her of that."

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Walter told Norton the precise position of affairs, and showed him the papers. "I am very sorry for your mother," said Norton, "not so sorry for you, because I can't think it would be a good thing for you to have settled down at Cressage. Perhaps, however, if my family had been in possession of an estate since the reign of Henry III, I should dislike the idea of losing it; but I don't altogether like the product of the small Country-house—it is proud, without having important responsibilities or duties; and I am sure you are right to sell the estate, though I would like, if I may, to show this statement to our bursar, who is a very acute man of business. But I agree with your mother—don't sell the house—don't part with Sir Hugh le Garnet, Knight, and the family pew. That is the kind of thing that can't be enjoyed unless it is inherited."

Norton went on to say that there had already been some talk among the Fellows of the College about offering Walter a Fellowship with some teaching work. "You must forgive me for having started the idea; I think you would fit in here very well, in spite of your tirade against the conventionality and the sameness of everything. I was absolutely determined that you shouldn't go and settle down in Shropshire at home. You couldn't have done that; you would have grown mouldy and metaphysical. You must do something active. I don't see you a schoolmaster. You might, of course, get a Civil Service job; but I think that what you want is direct contact with and responsibility for human beings. What you need—may I say?—is to think better of human nature. You are too lonely, and you are too critical. Now don't say no without thinking. You would be acceptable here. You have managed to get liked, without liking other people—I don't know how you do it—*noblesse oblige*, perhaps, and there may be

something chivalrous in long descent. Or possibly it is the same thing that makes you so good an examinée—an infinite capacity for making a good impression."

"I hope you will tell anyone who cares to know that I am ruined," said Walter. "I don't want to do anything under false pretences—the sooner it is known the better."

"Yes," said Norton, "and what is more, I think it may just turn the scale here. People in this world are very kind to people who have had a fall. The king's horses and men all hurried to the help of Humpty Dumpty, you know."

Walter dined in Hall with Norton that night. He found the Dons very civil to him. They had heard of his father's death, and Walter thought that a middle-aged Don who sat next him was silently weighing in his mind whether he was to be condoled with on the death of his father, or congratulated on having come into possession of a landed estate. Apparently he eventually decided that it was safer to do neither.

Walter stayed at Oxford two nights, and found the society of Norton both reposeful and bracing. "I hope you don't find me a dry stick," said Norton. "I do really feel very sorry for you about being displaced, and I think you take it very calmly. I should have been much more put out. But I always believe in facing facts at once, and not sentimentalizing over them. It is useless to indulge one's memory at such time. 'Remember Lot's wife'—that's the penalty of looking back, to become stiff and bitter. One can trust one's memory eventually not to play one false. It gets rid of its own poison, just as a stream drops its own refuse. I think you seem actually better for this sudden douche of disaster—and I am not leaving out of sight what you have had to suffer—your own sorrow, and

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still more your mother's—it makes my heart ache to think of her.”

“Yes,” said Walter. “I don’t want you to have a wrong idea about my own sorrow, such as it is; one can’t help feeling that for anyone who was so consistently kind and affectionate to one as my father was to me. But I realize that I never knew him—he seems removed from me by an infinite gap of feeling and experience—a gap he never bridged, nor encouraged me to bridge. And then the horrible confusion of his affairs; so much money wasted, such reckless borrowing! I can’t understand it, and it has been a hopeless surprise to me.”

“I’m not wholly surprised,” said Norton. “Your father was a great mystery to me; indeed, to speak frankly, he seemed like a man who was always fortifying himself, who knew there was something behind him in the path at which he dared not look. He appeared to be in perpetual need of reassurance.”

The next morning a letter forwarded from Cressage arrived for Walter.

THURSTON.

DEAR MR. WALTER,—

I have been thinking over our interview, and should like to begin by thanking you for the generous kindness with which you recognized my own painful position—so easy to be misunderstood—and in the way that you absolved me from blame. I must once more repeat that my conscience is absolutely clear as to the way in which I handled your father’s affairs. I had a great regard for him, and the confidence he reposed in me touched me deeply. I can honestly say that, granted that he must have had the money which he spent, he obtained most favourable terms from my firm. Moreover I can with equal honesty say that I am offering you very good terms now. What

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I feel uneasy about is whether a man of more resource and force of character in my place might have averted or minimized the catastrophe, might have brought home to your father more clearly the inevitable consequences of what he was doing, and pointed out what I can only call the heinous selfishness of his own course of action. I constantly tried to do this and failed. The truth is that your father's personal presence and manner had such an effect upon me, and produced in me so overpowering an awe, that I could not ever put clearly into words the intensity of my feelings. I regret this very much, and can hardly be surprised if you blame me. Yet so it was, and I doubt if I could have acted differently; while, if I had simply given up doing business for him, I consider that the position of things would be even worse than it is. I have never met a man so determined to have his own way, and so capable of disregarding all counter-considerations.

I have now one or two further suggestions to submit to you. If, as I hope, Mrs. Garnet thinks of going into another house, and if, as I foresee, you decide not to sell the Manor, I will venture to offer to become your tenant. I have long wished to move into the country, and to have the benefit of higher air. I will offer a rent of £200 a year for the house, to be increased in proportion to the value of any furniture you may leave there. If you accept this, I would venture to say that I think your mother would find my house, which I should vacate, a convenient one. I would retain the wing containing my office, and would let her have the rest at a rent of £75 a year. She would find it easy to run with two or three servants, and though it is not a large house, it has a certain dignity about it.

One further thing I would add. If in your consideration of various possible professions, it enters into your head to think of becoming a solicitor, I would gladly take you into my business without premium, and with a prospect of speedy partnership.

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The business, I may add, has increased very much of late, and my income is a large one, about £5,000 a year to my own share, and about £1,000 a year to my only partner, who as you may know does very little, and is soon about to resign. This is not a merely quixotic offer. You are a man of first-rate abilities, and I do not conceal from you that your name would be of great assistance to me in my business. You may not have thought of such work, but, if I may say so, I have long entertained for you an affectionate regard, and it would be a great personal pleasure to me to claim association with yourself. Of course this needs no immediate reply. You will, I hope, name a day we may meet.

Believe me, with kind regards,

Very sincerely yours,

HENRY WORSLEY.

Walter showed this letter to Norton, who read it carefully. When he finished, he gave it back to Walter, and sat musing.

"It is certainly a generous offer," he said, "and very frankly expressed. What will you do?"

"Oh, it decides me," said Walter, "to accept *your* offer, if it amounts to one. If there is a chance of work here, I will take it."

"You are throwing away a very good thing," said Norton. "Don't be in such a hurry."

"I *must*," said Walter. "I don't know why, but I feel as if I was being wound round with little cords by some sort of spider. I am beginning to feel paralysed. The letter is a good one, I know—very frank and very plain-spoken. But why does he want to get hold of me like this? It can't be *pure* kindness. Either he must be ashamed of himself, or he must have some very definite designs of his own."

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"I don't think you are right; I believe him to be a perfectly honest though rather timid man," said Norton. "But I suppose you will let him have the house—that's all square."

"Of course," said Walter; "it's just what we want. But I'll wait a day or two. When could you tell me anything definite?"

IV

FOR the next two or three weeks Walter had a time of confused and trivial duties. One of the difficulties was with his mother. Mrs. Garnet had a heart that could hold any number of loves and affections, and Walter was strangely moved to see how easily she was beguiled from her own sorrows by a letter, a message, or a visit that seemed to imply a personal regard. As to her changed fortunes, she did not consider them at all; but her mind was not of a capacious order, and she resembled a person playing at cup-and-ball with a single idea, an idea which she tossed into the air, and generally failed to intercept; the dilemma being simply how she was to make her belief in the devotion, perfect wisdom, and practical ability of the Squire fit in with the extreme havoc he had wrought in the family fortunes. She was incapable of attributing any error to anyone whom she knew, and Mr. Worsley was soon forgiven; and she took refuge at last in a belief in the extraordinary unworldliness of the Squire, and a conviction that he had been in some way deceived by certain unknown persons—"those London people—of course dear Henry and good Mr. Worsley were no match for them."

Walter had a further interview with Mr. Worsley, in which he accepted Mr. Worsley's offer to become tenant of the Manor, and for his mother the tenancy of Mr. Worsley's house in Thurston. The suggestion that he should join Mr. Worsley's business he gratefully refused, on the ground

that he hoped to get work in Oxford, and that he doubted his capacity for the business of a solicitor. Mr. Worsley seemed unduly disappointed by this, and Walter was conscious of what seemed to him an almost painful anxiety on Mr. Worsley's part to conciliate him and make things easier.

For things were by no means easy. Walter had lived so long at his ease about money that he was again and again unpleasantly checked by recollecting that this or that natural and simple arrangement was an extravagance that must be resisted. Mrs. Goring cut the knot for the time being by asking his mother to stay at the Vicarage, a kindness much deplored by her William, who confessed that it would prove a great hindrance to him in the discharge of his spiritual duties. But he was promised the undisturbed occupancy of his study, and assured by his wife that she would be entirely responsible for Mrs. Garnet's entertainment; and a trial it undoubtedly was, for Mrs. Garnet showed no signs of being able to provide herself with any occupation, and was at leisure from morning to night to pursue the same train of bewildered speculation. All which Mrs. Goring bore with endless kindness and sympathy. Indeed the one admirable thing about Mrs. Garnet was that she never indulged in self-pity or personal resentment, or gave her own deprivation a moment's thought. Her one aim was to preserve the spotless integrity of the Squire's character, and to prove that his "misfortunes," as she now called them, were rather to his credit than otherwise.

It was a day or two before Mrs. Garnet quitted the Manor that Helen came to see her. She was to spend the afternoon and have tea; Walter took her in to his mother, and watched with amazement the instantaneous establishment of a strong personal relation between the elderly lady and a girl whom she hardly knew, through the freemasonry of love. He

left them alone together. Mrs. Garnet spent most of her time in her own sitting-room, with the blinds half drawn down, and her occupation in her solitary hours was to sort the Squire's letters. Walter was almost awed by the fire of compassion that seemed to burn in Helen's eyes, and his mother's dependence on a fellow-creature's love.

They had tea together; and when the car arrived for Helen, Walter proposed that they should walk down together to Thurston, five miles away. He had only had a few words with her hitherto, and his longing to speak to her had become almost overpowering. But when they started he found himself almost tongue-tied. Helen said a few words about Mrs. Garnet.

"It is simply amazing to me that your mother has not a single thought about herself. Of course," she went on, "she isn't the sort of person who loses much consciously by a disaster like this. I suppose she has never cared about money or position—simply about people; and one of the surprising things she said to me was that she had never suspected how many good friends she had, or how much people cared for her."

"It is wonderful," said Walter; "it is the one thing needful, and one feels ashamed of having to take so much more complicated a view. What am I to think about my father, Helen? I don't know what to think. Endlessly kind and patient on the one hand to my mother and myself and everyone else about him—I can't remember ever having heard him utter an angry word—and yet he was an able man, and he must have known what he was preparing for us. Just think of it—the last of these mortgages was made that he might have money to send me abroad, travelling like a prince. If he had been a muddled and sanguine man it

would have been different, but he always did things deliberately."

"It is a difficulty," said Helen, "and indeed I understand how difficult. My father feels the same, I am sure. He has been very much out of spirits lately. He feels he ought to have managed differently. And, Walter, I am unhappy too about our going to the Manor. My father has bought your estate, he tells me, and is to live in your house. It would seem to anyone who did not know, that he had used his position to oust you. I can't bear to think of it; my father is the very last man to take an unfair advantage. I don't understand him. He has always been the kindest of fathers to me, and I have been his companion ever since my mother died; but he never tells me anything or takes me into his confidence. Can't older and younger people hold any communication, even when they love each other?"

"Helen, you mustn't think like that," said Walter. "I have been into it all, and I think your father has acted all through like a real friend. He has been most generous. I am sure he could never have been able to persuade my father, though I am sure he tried. My father simply hypnotized people. Of course he used to talk—what shall I say?—rather crudely about himself and his position, and no doubt people who only knew him a little, thought him pompous and perhaps even absurd. Yet in his presence, one couldn't contradict him or oppose him. It was like a flowing tide."

"I can't say how good it is to hear you say that about father," said Helen; "and I must say again how splendid it is that you, like Mrs. Garnet, don't seem to regard what you have personally lost. I suppose that comes from bringing-up. My father used to say that, whatever else the Squire was, he had the old-fashioned chivalry about him. Is it that?"

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Tell me, is it that you don't say what you feel, or that you don't really care?"

"I hardly know what it is," said Walter. "I do care, very much. I hate losing so many things which make life easy. I like walking about and feeling important, and I don't like earning my living; but about this particular matter I don't deserve any credit. I would take it, if I did. But the whole thing is so bad in many ways that it has got to be seen through, and that is all I can think about at present."

They stopped at a turn, where the road came out of the wood, and ran in a curve round a bare knoll covered with fern and juniper, before it entered the wood again. To left and right the bare wolds rose high above the woods. At the end of the valley there was a glimpse of the wide river-plain, but where they stood they could see little but tree-tops and solitary pastures.

"This is our boundary, Helen—I ought to say *your* boundary now."

She winced, and looked at him appealingly. "Oh, Walter, it is frightful," she said.

"I wasn't going to call attention to my fortitude," said Walter. "I was only thinking of a little Greek poem where a field speaks and says, 'I used to be called the field of So-and-so, and now I am the field of So-and-so.' I am nobody's field really—I belong to fortune."

"But think how long there have been Garnets at Cressage!"

"You want to make me personal, when I was trying to be philosophical."

"Oh, Walter, what a wretch I am! But what am I to say? I hate our having it as much as I hate your not having it."

"But I," said Walter, "if I can't keep it, as I should like

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to do, would rather it belonged to your father, and so in a sense to you, than to anyone else; and, Helen, the thought that *you* will be at the Manor and caring for it as I did, takes away half the misery of it."

"I'm not as fine as that," said Helen. "If I lost anything I should hate that any of my friends should have it."

"What nonsense!" said Walter; "but there are some good points about it all. I am sure my mother will be happier among people and in a smaller house, and I am going to Oxford—at least I think I am. You know your father offered me a place in his business?"

"Yes, I wish that had appealed to you."

"Oh, I had much better go away. I should take to brooding over my fallen glories here."

"I shall do that for you, Walter."

"Helen, I won't have you say that! Your father has done his very best to break our fall. What could we have done without him? I don't say that my mother and I have exactly brought it on ourselves, but if your father could have saved us he would. You must behave like Roosevelt, who said when they told him he was President, 'We are going to have a bully time!'"

"How could he have been such a brute! But after all, he wasn't turning anyone out. I can't think how my father can do it."

"You think he had better leave us to be despoiled by auctioneers and agents for the sake of his own delicate feelings?"

"I see that," said Helen ruefully. "It seems awful either way."

"One other good thing it has done," said Walter, "at least from my point of view—it has brought about the very sort of friendship I wanted between you and me."

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"Yes," said Helen, smiling at him, "our letters were very nice; but somehow it seemed to me a little artificial! And now I should have thought that you would have hated us all."

"Shall I tell you exactly what I felt?" said Walter. "On that dreadful journey home, when I did not know what had happened, I felt as if my life had all been knocked to bits, and I wondered if our friendship had gone to pieces too. But now I find that you and my mother are the only two people in the world for whose feelings I care, and it seems to have pulled a veil away. I should like to say a great deal more, but I won't now. Do you remember how you joked about the beggar-maid? You didn't think how soon I should literally be the beggar-man!"

"Walter, when you say such things you torture me! We must leave all this alone."

"If that means that I am not to see you, I decline," said Walter. "Does your father know that you and I have been corresponding?"

"I don't know—I expect he does—I never know what he knows."

"I think you had better tell him," said he.

"Very well."

"You don't like telling him?"

"No, but I should like still less not doing what you want; and now here we are close on the town. How will you get back? Will you have the car?"

"No, thanks; it will do me good to walk. Bless you, dear Helen!"

They parted, and Walter waited till she reached a corner, when she waved her hand to him, and he resumed his solitary way.

V

WALTER spent the days after his mother had left the Manor to go to the Gorings' in various sordid tasks; he checked inventories, he went through papers. There was a great mass of old letters and documents going back to the eighteenth century; and it gave Walter what he had never had before, a sense of the continuity and tradition of the old family life. There was, for instance, in the dining-room a picture of a very grim and stout old Squire with Regency whiskers, his great-grandfather, which he had always disliked. But to his surprise he found some of the old man's love-letters, written in a tone of passionate devotion to the thin-lipped, faded woman with bedizened hair, who peeped out, in the portrait that hung next his, from between two cylindrical curls which hung on each side of her face—what was it, that strange transfiguring fiery glow, that burned so fiercely behind the young man's clumsy phrases? It seemed unfamiliar to Walter. The love-stories in books which he had read—he had accepted them as part of the stock-in-trade of books; but it had always seemed to him to be an affected hectic frame of mind, wholly unreal and fanciful. Walter's idea of affection was what he felt for his mother—something pitying and protective, which did not absorb his whole nature, and outside of which lay his critical, sceptical, mistrustful mind. His idea of a friendship was his relation with Norton, the essence of which was that

one could open one's mind freely, and say what one thought rather than what one felt. With Helen it was different again; that was another frank relation, he thought—it was not an intellectual partnership, but he could speak to her of his tastes and preferences, his impressions of other people, and feel himself in touch with a finer and more delicate sort of mind. She had a singular clearness of judgment and freshness of view. She could be amused by other people without despising them; but in that last talk he had had with her, he had felt himself in contact with something of the nature of flame—a warmth, a glow, an indignant kindling which had alarmed him vaguely. He felt that he would not care to have it turned upon him in anger or reproach. In his mother, though he condoned it, he had a sort of pity for the loyalty which could not bear to suspect even a trace of selfishness in his father; for little by little, the entire disregard by his father of anything except the whim of the moment, the resolute avoidance of any foresight, had begun to trouble him deeply. How did it fit in with all his father's sweetness of temper, his courteous consideration?

And then, too, Helen charmed him by her beautiful presence. She could not make a hurried or ungraceful movement or gesture. She seemed to have her slim frame all under control, from her clear eyes to her delicate fingertips. She gave him a sense of fullness of life, a current untroubled by any inertness or greedy impulse or headstrong desire. She fulfilled by a swift instinct the ideal of unsullied clearness and natural activity that he had set himself awkwardly to attain—how long ago it seemed!

One morning Mr. Goring called. His worn and melancholy face, the sternness of his forehead, his shy yet piercing eyes gave Walter a sudden sense of uneasiness.

“My dear Walter,” he said hesitatingly, “I hope I do not

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disturb you. I wanted to have a few quiet words with you about this sad business. I blame myself for neither writing to condole with you, nor saying a word of sympathy. I do such things dully and belatedly, not I hope with any lack of feeling, but because my mind naturally reverts to further issues."

"But it was I," said Walter, "who ought to have thanked you and Mrs. Goring for your extraordinary kindness to my mother. She would have been wholly lost without Mrs. Goring—and the way you have let yourselves be invaded! I can't say how truly kind I think it."

"You abash me," said the Vicar, "because though we have done what I hope was neighbourly under these circumstances, it must be put down to my dear wife's devotion to Mrs. Garnet rather than to my own courtesy. I must confess to you with much shame that I rebelled against the constraint that it would imply; you hardly know how selfishly I am wedded to seclusion and independence! You must absolve me from any credit in the matter. But I need not speak of that. We are honoured by your mother's presence. It is of yourself that I fain would speak."

"Please do," said Walter; "it is very good of you to bear me in mind."

"I will not beat about the bush," said the Vicar. "As your parish priest, I think I have a claim to be heard. Let me say first that your mother's loyalty to your father's memory, and I would add the courageous way in which you have faced the shock of your sad vicissitude, inspire me with respect. But my own task is rather to inquire into the spiritual significance of the affair. The inner spirit with which you regard it, whether you are conscious of the Hand of God in all this, whether you apprehend the purpose of His chastening, whether you have determined to make the

most of this opportunity of suffering—this is what I would be assured of! You will, I know, acquit me of any mean or personal inquisitiveness.”

“Of course,” said Walter. “It is good of you to ask me this, but I hardly know what to say. At present I am rather bewildered by the contrast between my father’s words and what seems to have been his course of action.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Goring, “I have asked myself the same question, and but for the fact that a Christian and a priest is bound to abstain from harsh judgments, I should say that your father’s conduct was highly reprehensible; but that is another matter, and does not prevent your viewing the affliction as a definite channel of grace.”

“I certainly can’t pretend to say that,” said Walter, a little nettled by Mr. Goring’s insistence. “My mother has been brought up in the use of wealth; I myself have never had to trouble about money or position; and I find my mother suddenly impoverished, while I myself have lost my imagined fortune, my standing, and the old family inheritance has all been swept away. I simply try not to think of it. Such things do happen in the world, but for me to pretend that I consider it a dispensation of mercy and love would be the worst sort of hypocrisy. I submit, because I must.”

“But have you reflected, my dear Walter,” said Mr. Goring, “how all these vain shows and false securities can eat into the soul? This trial is meant, I make no doubt at all, to be an act of love to save you from complacency and indifference, to bring out what is best in you, to make you depend upon yourself, to win your own worthy place in the world, rather than to inherit the effortless dignity of your forefathers. Your temptation has been towards idle dreaming and self-pleasing—though I admit you have led, so far

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as I know, an upright life, and have shown yourself a kind and loving son."

"I see your point," said Walter, "but it all seems to me a fortuitous affair. There are plenty of landowners that retain their estates. There are even clergymen who live in considerable comfort, without these ugly reverses. I don't see why it should fall upon me, and still less upon my mother, who is one of the most guileless and generous people I know."

"You wound me," said Mr. Goring. "I have often thought that my own comfort has been a grievous obstacle to my spiritual work. But let us not diverge. It has come to you, I have no doubt, because you have the seeds of nobleness in your soul. You can rise to great heights, if these seeds are not choked by worldly prosperity. Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth. If I am myself unchastened, it is because I am not worthy of His love."

Something stirred in the depths of Walter's soul at this strange exhortation. Mr. Goring continued: "You must not let the unworthiness of the messenger cloud the message, dear Walter. It has cost me much to speak thus, but I entreat you to be humble in God's sight, and to let Him work out His blessed will in you. I will not say more, I will only ask your pardon for speaking words which my own slothfulness and luxury might well tarnish."

He rose and shook hands. "Don't feel like this about yourself," Walter said. "I do know what you and Mrs. Goring do for the place; and I will not forget what you say. There is something within, though I cannot look at it so; I must just go forwards with what courage I can. I admit that if I could feel sure that there was any personal intention behind my misfortunes, it would make a great difference.

But I honestly do not. It seems to me just bad luck, though I am perfectly clear that I have got to make the best of it."

"Alas!" said Mr. Goring. "I recognize in you the knightly virtues, but hardly the Christian patience. But it will come—it will come; you will be guided into all truth!" And the worthy man beat a hasty retreat.

That day Walter lunched at the Vicarage. The Vicar was constrained and lost in thought. But when he withdrew, and Mrs. Garnet went to her room to rest, Mrs. Goring led Walter out to the garden and made him sit with her in the summer-house.

"Walter," she said, "I am afraid you had a bad time with my dear man this morning. He has been churning up his courage for days to speak to you. Probably he vexed you—that unfortunate jargon, you know, which always gets even my bristles up. But he's a much better man than he wants you to think. It is pitiful to me to see what a sacred duty it is to him to decry himself. But he has been through agonies about this. What did he say?"

Walter told her. She listened, poking with her stick at the interstices of the tiles. "Yes, I see," she said, "and of course it is all very grimly put; these good people always run their theories too hard. They demand a consistency from life, perhaps from God, which one can't get. It isn't a mechanical affair, like the tide and the sunset. There is a personal force behind the world—at least I think so—which ebbs and flows just as we do. Don't think me unkind, Walter; I love you, my dear, as if you were my own boy, perhaps more, because I have never had a child of my own—you don't mind an old woman saying that?—and there is something in what my dear, stiff-minded William says.

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You *have* got a fine mind, and a fine courage. My dear, how proud of you I should be, if I were your mother, to see you take up this horrible burden so quietly. It is a cruel thing to have all your outside defences swept away, and swept away by the very person who was always deluding you into a false sense of prosperity. I can't forgive your father, dear; I don't think him a deliberately bad man, but he had the awful strength of selfish weakness. You have been cuddled and wrapped up and cossetted in a dreadful way, and there must be a lot of good stuff behind, for you to have come out of it a reasonable person at all. And I do honestly think it gives you a big chance. What you needed was to be thrown into the sea and made to swim. You haven't gone to the bad, you are perfectly sound and straight, but you are still entangled in some of these cobwebs; you must step out, make friends, give yourself away, blunder, tumble: I don't care what happens so long as you can find yourself. The danger was that you would be helplessly shut up in yourself, as you were, you know, dear Walter. You didn't trust anybody, you looked down on simple people, you followed your own fancies. I don't mean, dear, that you were superior or stand-offish. But the difference is that you have come out of a little stuffy room into the wind and rain. It has been a very little affair—it is going to be a very big affair. Follow instinct a little, and not reason. But, oh dear," said Mrs. Goring suddenly, with a suspicious glistening about her honest eyes, "how I have been talking! Women are natural preachers! I once said to William that I was always terrified in his sermons that he would come to a stop, and he said that it was far better than if I thought he would never leave off."

Walter got up from his chair, put his arms round Mrs. Goring and kissed her. "Thank you a thousand times,"

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he said. "I did think there was something in what the Vicar said, though it rather stifled me. But I see what *you* mean, and you are perfectly right, every single word."

VI

THE shuffling of the two houses had been accomplished, and the move was over. The great difficulty had been to get Mrs. Garnet to decide upon anything. She chose the furniture she was to take away, not because it was necessary or because it was beautiful or even valuable, but because she had associations with it. But it was done, though for several weeks her talk was full of articles which she had forgotten. So much indeed did this weigh upon her mind, that Walter at last approached Mr. Worsley on the subject, who showed himself extraordinarily considerate. If a list could be provided, she could of course have anything from the Manor she desired. The sad thing however was that, though the new and smaller house suited her better, it became clear that what she was really pining for were the very duties which she had found so irksome at the Manor. Walter spoke about this to Mrs. Goring.

"Ah, my dear Walter," she said, "it isn't *that*—it is that she wants someone, like your father, to work for. Your mother's great hold on life has been that she had an exacting person whom she loved to arrange things for. It *can't* be artificially provided. She must find a new life for herself."

As to the loss of dignity, Mrs. Garnet never gave it a thought; and Walter was relieved to find, as soon as the final accounts were made up, that there was an income which

was ample for her wants, and would leave a little margin for himself. Moreover, now that she was more accessible, many people called to see her. From the social point of view, she had acquired a certain prestige by her misfortunes. Her kindness and simplicity had a romantic flavour, and Walter saw that a new life would soon shape itself. He himself had plenty of occupation. Norton wrote to him that although he could pledge no one, he regarded it as certain that Walter would be in a month or two offered a teaching post at his College, and possibly a Fellowship. He recommended Walter to begin working up the subjects he might have to teach, and sent him a list of books. Walter's days took on a certain routine. He worked hard, morning and evening; he listened very good-humouredly to a great deal of idle talk. But he had no intimate friend in the town, and felt his work to be a sort of anodyne, which drugged something poisonous and feverish below. He could not conceal from himself the fact that beneath the apparently tranquil surface, there burned a sullen resentment against life, against his father, against the way he had been allowed to grow up, against the trifling humiliations he had to submit to; for though he had set little store upon the mild consequence he had enjoyed before, as a young man belonging to the county rather than to the locality, and with a prospect of wealth before him, he found that the subtle deference with which he had been treated had disappeared. He had parted with his estate; he was just a young man of good ability who lived with his widowed mother, and had his own way to make like everyone else. If he had been capable of pose, if he could have assumed a tragic melancholy of mien, he would undoubtedly have excited romantic sympathies. But this had no attraction for him; he made himself civil and attentive to his mother's callers, and greeted his acquaint-

ances with bonhomie. He was supposed, he found, to be rather heartless, and absorbed in intellectual pursuits. Mrs. Goring's words had put some heart into him, but the stimulus died down when he found that he had to live a comfortable and ordinary life. There was nothing to evoke endurance, nothing to battle against, except kindly bourgeois surroundings.

In this frame of mind, his desire for Helen's company grew till it sometimes reached an almost insupportable thirst. But it was not easy to arrange opportunities of meeting. Helen was very busy with the new arrangements. He could not bring himself to go to the Manor as a casual caller. Some deeply-rooted pride in him rebelled against the idea of being seen walking about Thurston with her, after all that had happened. Moreover, Walter had become aware that there was a certain feeling in the town against Mr. Worsley. It was partly the envy caused by the visible evidence of his success, and partly too a vague feeling that he must in some way or other have taken advantage of the Squire. Mr. Worsley himself came as regularly as ever to his business, and often looked in for a few minutes to see Mrs. Garnet or Walter, and to inquire if they had any requisition. His amiability was extreme. He had carried out repairs and decorations at the Manor on a liberal scale, and had refused to decrease the rent. Mrs. Garnet depended on him greatly, and expressed to all her visitors her extreme appreciation of his friendly offices, which did something to mitigate the unfavourable rumours.

Walter at last wrote to Helen, and said that he could not endure the separation. He suggested that he should come up the road towards the Manor early some afternoon, and that she should meet him at a point where a lane diverged to the east, leading to some hamlets and a great common,

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which had once been part of the old forest of Cressage, a hunting chase, once a part of the Garnet property. In the middle of this stood the ruins of a derelict church, which had been a favourite walk of Walter's in old days. Helen gladly consented. They met as arranged, and from some way off he could see her under an old oak, which stood where the roads divided, pacing rather restlessly to and fro. She came down to meet him, and a great wave of gladness surged up in his mind at the sight of her. He had been living, he felt, among shadows, people whom he hardly knew, and who possessed no interest for him; while though he was always aware of his mother's love, the curious ramblings of her mind, sometimes deeply in earnest about something that seemed to him incredibly trivial, sometimes poignantly pathetic in their naïveté, had made him realize that his mother as a reasoning being was in some ways almost a stranger to him. Mr. Worsley was a continual mystery; but Helen at least was real. Her mind darted swiftly with an unexpected impetus in directions which he could not always clearly interpret; but he always felt an intense desire to follow her and track her thought. Then too there was something in her fresh outlook which dispersed the vague mists of speculation in which he was apt to wander, when the world lost its significance and seemed a mere conflict of blind and petty forces.

"It *is* good to see you, Helen," he said. "I get very much lost without you."

"You can't be as much puzzled as I am, Walter. I feel I am living in a dream, and when I wake up in my room up there and look out upon the woods at sunrise, I wonder if it is really me!"

Walter told her of the daily events in his life, how his mother was beginning to make friends, and to forget her

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grief a little; of his prospects at Oxford. She listened with alert attention.

"And you yourself?" she said.

"Oh, I hardly know—I lose myself in my work; and if you saw me chattering over the tea-table, you would think I had lived in Thurston all my life."

"Have you made any friends?"

"No, not really; there is a young doctor I rather like, but he is frightfully busy."

"Dr. Bowlby, I suppose—he is rather an interesting man. What do you make of him?"

"He has ideas, but he gives me the impression of being bored by his practice—he wants to research."

"He did wonders with father; he was the only doctor I ever saw who seemed to realize that his patient had any work he must do, and that he must fit his treatment to that."

"Helen, did you tell your father we wrote to each other?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Not very much. He looked at me in the quiet way he has, which always rather frightens me, but he seemed pleased rather than vexed; I am not sure he didn't know already."

"How did he know?"

"You can't keep any secrets in a country town," said Helen, laughing. "Besides, he always does know."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he said I was grown up, and it was entirely my own affair. He said he liked you very much, and thought you wanted friends."

"Nothing else?"

"Oh, well, yes; he said the sort of thing a father feels

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bound to say to his daughter. I don't know why older people always say such obvious things. You would think that with their experience they would be able to tell one something one didn't know."

"I suppose you mean that he said something about it's not . . . not going further."

"That sort of thing," said Helen, smiling.

"Well, it's a relief to know that we can do just as we like."

"Not in a country town, Walter; and you mustn't forget that many of the people who seem like marionettes to you, are very real people indeed to me. I am very fond of some of them. Do you know Miss Pinker?"

"That frozen spinster who comes and talks about the hangings at St. Chad's?"

"Would you suppose that she threw a book at Dr. Graves? He had been attending her—she is very serious about her symptoms, and when he left her, and had gone out, he half-opened the door, and said something jocose. She threw the book she was reading at his head. It was the *Imitation*, I believe."

"What nymphs!" said Walter. "I must observe Miss Pinker more closely."

It was a fresh day, but with a touch of spring in the air, that languor, half enervating, half intoxicating, that makes men and women look beautiful, and wonder what it is that they desire. The woods were misty with uncrumpling leaves, and the hedgerow was tapestried with climbing tendrils. A few early flowers showed their heads here and there. The ever-blowing wind rolled great clouds, white, but laden with grey glooms, over the low-lying horizon. They stopped to look at the plain spread below them.

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"I'm not used to these hill-views and far-off spaces yet, Walter," she said. "My eyes seem focused on the opposite side of the street."

"What do you think of the Manor?"

"I was afraid you were going to ask me that," and Helen's face clouded over a little. "Of course it is the loveliest old place, but I feel an interloper. The house is full of vexed spirits."

"What do you mean, Helen?"

"I suppose they are all inside my own mind," said Helen, "but I have a constant sense that I am not wanted; nothing in the house holds out its hands to me—it just endures me. My little sister loves it, and my father is—what is he?—he is proud to be there. I wish he wasn't *proud*. We seem to have gone scrambling and scuffling in."

"Good heavens," said Walter, "it is a perfect Godsend to me that your father should have taken it."

"Don't you resent our being there?"

"Why, Helen, the fact that you are there is the greatest possible comfort. I resign it to you with all best wishes."

"And then," went on Helen, "I am torn to pieces by the feeling of how awful it must have been for you to leave it. I don't honestly think your mother minds much—but you!"

"Helen, let me say once for all that it is not so. After all that has happened, I couldn't live there. You don't know the sort of person I am—that I am incredibly, revoltingly tough inside—I am sensitive in a way to lights and sounds and scenes, but those one can get anywhere and everywhere. I'm not in the least like a creeper embracing a ruin—I am much more like one of those big buzzing flies, that can buzz anywhere as long as there is sunlight and honey. You mustn't go on pitying me. It isn't that I

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don't love your feeling so, but I simply don't need it. Won't you believe me?"

"I don't know. I think you care more than you know—the deepest sort of caring."

They had drawn near, as they talked, to the ruins. A broken tower of stone, much overgrown with ivy, and a few arches were all that remained. Round about, the brambles grew thickly over mounds of stones, and further off there was a fragment of wall. The ground floor of the tower was intact, and had a vaulted roof; the door was barred by an old gate. Inside were some heaps of hay and dried bracken. "A shepherd's shelter, I think," said Walter; "I remember it always looked neat, as if someone had had an idea."

"Does that produce neatness?" said Helen.

"Not always, but there is no such thing as neatness without it."

Outside the tower, towards the nave, was a bit of a stone bench. Walter strewed some bracken on it. "Let us sit here a little, and see if we are interlopers," he said. He lit a cigarette, but Helen would not smoke. "I only smoke when I have lost my self-respect," she said.

"Helen, I think you look tired."

"One ought never to do that; but I fight little battles with myself day and night, and I haven't any of my old friends to beat and scratch up here. If you say you are tough inside, you ought to know what a dreadful fighter I am—I was always being punished in the schoolroom for that. I didn't want to pinch and prod people like some of my friends, but I liked a real set-to."

"You don't look much like that now."

"Oh, I have a veneer of civilization; but a real fighter is never quite civilized."

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"I don't believe I have any combative instinct," said Walter.

"No, indeed," said Helen. "You belong to the new age—I'm an importation from the time of your ancestors."

They returned slowly and with intervals of silence, one of which Helen broke by saying, "There—it is two minutes exactly by my wrist-watch since either of us spoke. Don't you think that is a good sign? Is it true, Walter, that among men, the surest proof of being the greatest possible friends is that two men can sit a whole evening together without exchanging a single word?"

"It isn't exactly true," said Walter, "but I can see what it means. After all, I suppose it is the way in which husbands and wives often live!"

"I have known of very devoted couples where the husband never speaks when they are alone together; and one at least where the wife only opens her lips to say 'Amen.' "

A little later Helen said, "Tell me more about Oxford. I thought you said you were thankful to get away; why are you going back?"

"Partly," said Walter, "because I must earn my living; and partly because it seems the only obvious way of doing it."

"You wouldn't have a word to say to papa about his offer; he was very much disappointed."

"He would have been much more disappointed if I had come."

"But what exactly are you going to do at Oxford?"

"I am going to be like the camel in the desert," said Walter, "and produce for the weary travellers the water which I had reserved for my own consumption."

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"What a horrible idea!" said Helen. "I should have thought there were so many things you could do."

"Such as?"

"Well, there don't seem to be so many, after all," said Helen.

"I came down from Oxford feeling very superior," said Walter. "It seemed very magnificent not having to earn one's living, and pitying the poor devils who had to go straight into the mill. But now I am like a pricked bladder—with some of the vulgarity at all events let out of me."

"Oh, Walter, don't talk like that."

"I won't—it's disgusting! It's only another and a worse way of being superior; but seriously I think I can manage to get on quite decently with undergraduates, and the Dons are very civil. But I haven't any programme. It seems awfully flat, to go away with one's head in air, thinking Oxford a poky place, and casting the dirt off one's feet, and a few months later to go back and eat the dirt one cast away. Oh, I am beginning all over again. How curious it is that one should hate smartness in other people, and then when one gets into trouble, one begins to try to be smart oneself."

"I do understand so well, Walter. It's what I always want to do myself when I feel snubbed—only I can't be smart if I try."

"Don't take any notice of it; it isn't myself really. I am not like that inside. It's only a way one gets into!"

They were soon at the oak tree. "Let us have another walk soon, Helen. I can't tell you what good it does me. Another time I won't be so hateful."

"You are *never* hateful."

And so they parted, Walter watching her going lightly upwards, till she was hidden in the wood. As she went, she

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pondered over the strange savageries of the male mind. It was a little frightening, but intensely interesting, to have to look so close at the bitterness of a young and clever man fresh from a sudden reverse of fortune. She smiled, thinking that after all men were not so much unlike women, only they phrased things differently. She rather liked that; but she would have liked Walter to be a little more lofty, with a romantic sadness—"but I can listen to him, at all events," she thought. . . .

She was late for tea, and her father was alone in the big panelled drawing-room. He was standing, cup in hand, facing her as she entered. He wore a triumphant look, but his tone when he spoke was dry. "I like someone to be here to give me tea," he said.

"Yes, I'm sorry, papa," said Helen, "but I met Walter Garnet and walked with him."

"Ah, well!" said Mr. Worsley, and she could see that she was more than forgiven.

VII

EVERYTHING went smoothly at Oxford. In the middle of June, Norton wrote to tell Walter that he had been elected a lecturer, and that if he did well in that capacity, a fellowship would soon be available. He was to begin work in October. Norton said that he had better come up and choose some rooms, and added that if there were the smallest difficulty about money for furnishing, the College would advance what was necessary. As a matter of fact it was Norton himself who found the money, and arranged the matter with the Bursar. Walter went up to Oxford early in July, chose and equipped with a certain austerity a set of rooms close to Norton's, and experienced, contrary to his expectation, a certain mild elation at the prospect of being a Don.

"It's a label, at all events," he said to Norton, as they sat together in Norton's rooms one hot evening.

"That's what it is, is it?" said Norton. "That's the worst of coming down from such heights; that what seemed to me, when I was elected, the height of human dignity and felicity, is a small label for the despoiled inheritor of an ancient name."

Walter flushed, and said, "Yes, it was simply beastly of me, old man. I suppose I shall get out of it some time. It's very curious that I don't think I thought much of 'the glories of my birth and state' before, and now that I have lost them, I parade them like an utter bounder."

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"Don't overdo it, my boy," said Norton. "It's not that—it's only a touch of melodrama, which afflicts the noblest minds."

"It reminds me of something I want to tell you; I have meant to tell you for some time;" and Walter gave a brief narrative of his friendship with Helen. Norton listened in silence.

When Walter had finished his story, Norton said, "That's all very interesting, but do you want me to talk about it frankly, or do you want to lie and gnaw your bone? Mind, I don't want to comment unless you really wish it."

"Yes, I wish it very much—it bewilders me when I think of it all; but it seems the biggest thing that has ever happened to me yet, and I can't say why."

"Yes, indeed; it is rather a sudden excursion, isn't it? But what is going to come of it?"

"The friendship of all others that I wanted," said Walter. "I feel as if I had found a long-lost sister."

"Yes, but you can't lead about a sister, you know," said Norton, "like the blessed apostle. My dear Walter, don't you see you are playing with gunpowder?"

"You talk as if it was a kind of flirtation. I have not been making love to Helen."

"There are many kinds of flirtation, my boy. I am not sure that the most dangerous of all isn't the kind that says it isn't flirting, and does not know it is flirting."

"But Helen isn't that sort of girl at all."

"So much the worse for you. I foresee an explosion."

"What sort of an explosion?"

"Why, you may fall head over heels in love with her—she is a charming girl—or she with you."

"There's not the least chance of that; besides, I couldn't afford to marry."

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"So you are to be free and she is to be bound?"

"She isn't bound at all. You have got hold of the wrong end of the stick."

"But if a little lover came along, there wouldn't be much left of your friendship."

"You think I ought to cry off?" asked Walter.

"Not a bit; go on and prosper; but you must be prepared for complications."

"I don't see that."

"But I do. This Platonic affair isn't as Platonic as you think. Are you prepared to say, 'My dear Helen, I am not in a position to marry you, and we must not fall in love with each other?'"

"Yes, I think I could almost say that."

"Good Heavens, you have been such a cold-blooded fellow all your life that you haven't the least idea what these things may mean. Have you ever read the Song of Solomon?"

"Yes, I like the style."

"Mercy on us! have you seen nothing but the style? Do you know Shelley's lines to an Indian air?"

"Yes."

"Is that a matter of style—elegant hyperbole, I suppose?"

"My dear Harry, what do *you* know about it?"

"What I can't tell you—what you will find out for yourself."

"You see you don't know Helen," said Walter. "Won't you come down and stay with us for a little and see for yourself?"

"Yes, I'll come; I see it is no use talking to you; but I'm not surprised. Your disaster has taken you that way. You are exalté, and feel superior to all human weakness."

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"Superior—superior?" said Walter, "when I feel like Humpty Dumpty, with all the yolk gone out of me."

"Yes, but it's the best yolk, isn't it?"

Soon after Norton's arrival, Mr. Worsley looking in one morning found that he was there, and said to Walter:

"I am afraid it's no use asking *you* to come up to the Manor to luncheon, Mr. Walter. You must choose your own time for that, and you have only to express a wish; it would be a great honour to us to receive you, though I fear it cannot be other than painful. But will you not let Mr. Norton come and lunch with us? I will make a point of being at home any day. I venture to suggest this, as being your father's executor and an old friend of the family, it would be well that I should understand what your Oxford prospects are—if you do not disdain my intervention."

Walter assured Mr. Worsley it would be the very thing he most desired; and it was agreed that Mr. Worsley should take Norton up the next day in his car. Walter entreated Norton at all costs to get a walk with Helen, and in order to ensure this, sent Helen a line. He himself, in Norton's absence, took a lonely walk in the country. He was gradually exploring the country round Thurston, as most of it was unfamiliar to him. That afternoon he followed a winding lane, which passed between high hazel hedges, now through a woodland, now out on to high sloping pastures. It was a fresh and sunny day, and the country looked extraordinarily beautiful, as the lane, which apparently had no design or sense of direction, opened up little vistas, this way and that, of deep stream-fed valleys and secluded farmsteads. He came at last to the bottom of the hill, where a little old cottage, with a garden full of budding flowers in

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front of it, nestled in a corner of the wood. There seemed to be a footpath here, and he was about to inquire, when two children, a small boy and girl, came to the gate. They were fair-haired children and regarded him curiously, without any shyness. He asked if there was a footpath to Thurston, and the little boy, with true rustic caution, said in a piping voice, "Where do you come from?" "From up there," said Walter, smiling vaguely and indicating the direction from which he had come. "From Redland Farm?" said the little girl in a penetrating treble. "Perhaps I did," said Walter. The two children conferred together. "No, 't isn't," said the little boy. "Oh, you know," said the girl, and then to Walter: "Yes, the path up in the wood," pointing to a path behind the house. Walter thanked them, and went his way. A minute later, he saw, to the right of the path, a plank bridge across the stream, and crossed it; as he did so, two shrill voices out of the copse beside him said, "Not that way," and the children, who had followed him unseen, emerged laughing. "Oh, not this way?" said Walter; "which way then?" "Up the wood," said the girl. "What is it called—the wood, I mean?" said Walter. Again the two children conferred together. "It's Welhead Wood," said the boy. The girl looked at him admiringly, and then said to Walter, "Oh, sir, isn't he a funny little boy?" This seemed likely to promote hostilities, and Walter presented each of them with a penny; the children gazed at their coins in speechless joy, but as Walter struck into the wood, the children piped after him, "Good-bye," "Thank you," holding up their pennies aloft.

It was a pleasant little omen, Walter thought, and his spirits rose as he paced along a grassy path in the wood, which from the glimpses he had of it seemed of great extent. A moment later he found the origin of its name; out of an

earthenware pipe, fixed in a little scarp of sandstone, a stream of clear water ran bubbling into a well edged with stones, and with a thick growth of water-plants all round. The water was deliciously cool, and Walter took a long draught; below him, through an open glade, down which the well-water ran in a little channel, he could see the opposite side of the valley with red miniature cliffs standing out among the wood. One of those inconsequent raptures which some accident of an unfamiliar scene and westerling light may arouse, rose swiftly up in his mind; the incredible beauty and sweetness of the place filled with the fresh forest scent, and the sound of bubbling waters, came upon him with a sudden joy, as of a gift put into his hands by some unseen power, which after all wished him well.

That evening after a dinner, when Walter could not sufficiently admire Norton's smiling attentiveness and unflagging interest in some very rambling recollections contributed by Mrs. Garnet, the two sat together in Walter's little room—he had chosen Helen's room for his study—and Norton gave an account of his adventures. Mr. Worsley, when they were alone together, had talked with a grave and affectionate concern of Walter's affairs. "I assure you, Mr. Norton," he had said, "I did the best I could in a very painful situation. I feel that I ought perhaps to have given some hint beforehand; but the Squire had a way of imposing his will on those about him which baffled me at the time. I did my best to alarm the Squire, to check his extravagance, and I may say I partially succeeded. But after his death, immediate measures were necessary. I will confess that I had more or less thought out a plan of action, and I have no doubt that we have made the very best out of a bad job."

"What did you say?" said Walter.

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"I assured him that both you and Mrs. Garnet were most grateful to him, and had no sort of doubt that he had done his best for you. He seemed much relieved. He then went on to ask me about your position, and about the future, and he assured me that, as you were now living, there would be plenty of money for all reasonable needs. Then he beat about the bush a good deal. Had you any plans, any thought of marriage, any scheme for rehabilitating the family fortunes? I said frankly that I believed you felt you had not enough to marry on, and meant to put it out of your mind at present. He gave me the impression that he would have liked to pursue this, but finally he asked whether you felt the whole thing very much."

"I hope you were discreet."

"I said that it was difficult to judge—that it had been a great shock, but that the necessity of taking practical action had relieved and steadied you. He asked if you had many friends at Oxford, and I said that you had many acquaintances, but not, I thought, many intimate friends. He then said that he regarded you with great affection, and that he wanted to do everything he could to help things along. Would I feel quite free to tell him if I thought he could be of use?"

"He seems to have cross-examined you pretty closely!"

"Yes, he did! But, Walter, I think the man is perfectly straight and sincere. I don't know what his precise reasons are, but I have no doubt that he wants to atone for mischief which he thinks he might have prevented; and I have no sort of doubt, too, that he feels the affection he professes. He is rather an over-tactful man, and not very adroit, and the result is that he gives an impression of insincerity, of having something unconfessed or up his sleeve, which I don't think is the case. You mustn't cold-shoulder him."

"He rather stifles me with that cautious and lengthy

manner," said Walter. "I never feel really face to face with him."

"Well, then we got to the Manor," Norton went on, "and he has really done very well by it. He has not over-trimmed it, or over-smartened it. Everything is beautifully kept, and I should hardly know it was not your house still—his own furniture is imperceptible. At luncheon there was Helen, her younger sister Clare, the governess, Miss Haden, and myself. The younger sister seems rather irrepressible, and the governess was always signalling to her. Worsley is very nice with his daughters. He didn't give any orders; he appealed to Helen, asked what she had arranged, smiled indulgently at Clare's nonsense, included Miss Haden in the talk. It wasn't very easy, but it was a well-staged affair. After luncheon, he said he must go back to the office shortly, and I strolled to the gate-house with him smoking. He has done it up beautifully. Upstairs he has made a beautiful little sitting-room and bedroom. The old gate-keeper lives on the ground floor, and gets up to the attics by one of the turrets. He showed me the two rooms, and I was really rather moved by his saying, 'My hope is that some day I shall have the honour of seeing Mr. Walter occupying these rooms. It was with him in view that I have prepared them. He could be undisturbed here—but of course it cannot be yet—one mustn't force things, where old affections are concerned.'"

"Almost thou persuadest me," said Walter; "but what about Helen?"

"The enchanting Helen," said Norton. "I am coming to her. When Worsley went away, he said to Helen that he left me in her charge—I might like to look round—the car would be back in half an hour, and I could go down in it at any time; perhaps I might be persuaded to stay for tea?"

"What did Helen do?"

"Oh, she was delightful. Walter, that girl is a treasure! She took me all round, and really talked charmingly, and with good sense too, about you. She said frankly that she had got to know you quite fairly well. She told me how unhappy it made her to feel vaguely as if they had turned you out, and then she talked about you, asked me no end of questions about you."

"What did you do?"

"I expatiated."

"You must tell me what you said."

"Walter, I will not! I told her about your past as I knew it, and we talked quite plainly about your father and mother. But I could not tell her much that she didn't know about you."

"Why on earth not?"

"Because she knew it all already; she has taken your measure, old man! She has no inconvenient or absurd illusions, though perhaps she is inclined to think you a little too heroic just now. But she is rational; and when I say that about anyone, man or woman, it means a great deal. She is a very generous, sweet-tempered, kindly girl, Walter—that's the long and short of it. She isn't a bit egotistical—at least not more than we all ought to be—and she really has a kind of passion for trying to put things straight and to make people happy. Moreover, she has an excellent sense of humour, not ill-natured at all, but very much aware of anything absurd or affected. Don't ever try on any poses with her, my boy!"

"Did she think I had been doing so?"

"I won't go into details, I tell you. That girl cares a great deal about you and your happiness. I don't think she is in love, technically speaking. She's more like the

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Good Samaritan at present, bringing along the oil, and wine, and I saw the twopence for the host clasped quite firmly in that strong little hand. I am not sure she didn't give it me, by the way," and Norton began to feel in his pockets with a whimsical air.

"Don't play the fool," said Walter. "Tell me what I ought to do!"

"Find out!" said Norton. "This isn't the sort of case where anyone can advise. You must trust your own instincts. Don't be too high-minded or too austere. I shall think you a perfect fool, if you let that fine creature go. Yet I think you are almost capable of it."

"What do you mean?" said Walter.

"I can't explain, old man. But when in doubt, say nothing. She is as sharp as a needle, and sees the point before you have spoken half a dozen words. Don't try to impress her; you can trust her to understand."

"But can I trust myself?" said Walter.

"Ah, I can't go into that; but I can tell you that it is all right, so far as things have gone at present."

"Then you're not afraid of an explosion?"

"Ah, that's just the one thing no one can foretell," said Norton. "But I can't go on for ever. I have talked so much to-day, and projected myself so diligently into so many contingencies, that I hardly know who is talking. I really must go to bed!"

VIII

A WEEK later Walter was sitting one morning over his books in his little room. He was to take a small class of men in a classical subject in the following term, and was preparing a set of informal lectures, with grave misgivings as to his fitness for the work; and indeed he had become very much absorbed in it. The door opened and Norton strolled in. "How are the lectures getting on?" he said, and took up the notebook in which Walter was writing. "I say, this won't do!" he said.

Walter looked at him despondently. "I was afraid they were rather thin," he said.

"Thin!" said Norton, "it's just the other way—they are as thick as treacle. You weren't thinking of reading this stuff aloud to the boys?"

"Yes," said Walter. "I was afraid if I didn't have it all down, that I should forget my points."

"But, look here," said Norton, "this is a kind of professional disquisition—half the points you are making are far too abstruse and minute. You would never get to the end of it, and they wouldn't understand what you were driving at. They are only public school boys, remember. They will come to you believing you to be a prodigy of learning, and this would confirm them in their darkest suspicion: what you have to do is to show that you are a human being, and understand their difficulties and know how to explain them. You must do all this *viva voce*, and

make a few jokes and keep things alive. This is as dead as mutton."

"But you don't know how terrified I shall be," said Walter.

"I do—I have been through it all myself; but the point is that they shouldn't suspect it. You must just get the main difficulties quite clear, and give them a bit of compressed teaching every now and then on a particular word or a point of grammar. You mustn't bore them. You must find it moderately entertaining, and must believe that you have got hold of valuable knowledge in an intelligible form which they can't get in books. Then if you like to drop a few words at the end about literary things or the Roman view of life, so much the better. I am surprised at you, Walter. You so firmly declined to know anything about your books except what would pay, that I thought you would do this to perfection."

"It's hardly an education, is it?" said Walter.

"I won't have my words brought up against me," said Norton. "But everyone must teach in his own way—my advice to you is just to know your subject well, and be quite certain that you won't be floored by any question they might ask. Then go ahead on your own lines. But I didn't come in here to tread on your toes. What I want to know is this. I have been here a week, and you have made no attempt to see the fair Helen. You have left her to me. It's a case of

'I will bury myself in my books and the devil may pipe to his own.'

"It's all rather awkward," said Walter. "I really can't go to the Manor just yet; and if she comes here to tea, my mother takes possession. I can't be always asking her to meet me for *tête-à-tête* walks."

"Faint heart," said Norton; "but I *do* understand, and better than you think. It is this being put off by small sensitive feelings—all the trifles which a full-blooded man sweeps away like dust—which will make you lose the big things. Helen likes you and your company, and you like hers; why not take some advantage of that? I suppose you are afraid of what people will say."

Walter sat looking rather confused. "Yes," he said, "I don't know what she expects, or what Worsley expects, or what other people will think of it all."

"What the devil does it matter? I tell you what it is. I like that girl myself better than I have ever liked anyone of the kind. If you have no use for her, I have; and I shall try to supplant you."

"I hope you won't do that; in fact, I should be rather annoyed if you did."

"Walter, you are really very trying. Here is this charming maiden, quite willing to be friends with you; and you sit here and do nothing. You don't even say, 'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair,' like the man in Grimm. You expect her to sit smiling up aloft, waiting until you are kind enough to extend your sceptre. How do you know there aren't half a dozen youths on the war-path?"

"Oh, they are a shoddy lot, the young bucks of Thurston. She wouldn't look at them."

"Not quite up to our level, I suppose," said Norton. "Thank God, I never belonged to the county circles—it's a very thin air."

"I'm quite aware of it, but what am I to do?"

"Why, go to the Manor, of course," said Norton, "like a sensible human being. They aren't fine feelings that prevent you. They are merely morbid and affected sensibilities. Of course it isn't pleasant to find people living

in one's old home, but why not accept it at once? It wouldn't hurt you and it would immensely relieve them."

"You are rather down on me this morning."

"Because you swallow the cow and stick at the tail. You have behaved very decently and sensibly about all this, but you just won't give it the finishing touch. You must insist on their finding the cup a trifle bitter. I quite admit that Worsley is a pushing fellow; he is in love with his own consequence. But he has behaved well to you. Why mingle his drink with ashes?"

Walter sat back in his chair frowning and drumming on the ground with his foot. "I'm damned if I will be dragooned into this," he said.

"All right," said Norton. "I've done my best to make you see light, and if you won't, you won't. It's your affair, after all, and not mine."

"Yes, that's just what I think," said Walter.

Norton looked at him for a moment, and left the room.

Half an hour later, just before lunch, Walter went out into the garden. Norton was sitting reading, and looked up.

"I climb down," said Walter. "I was infernally rude to you just now; but you were perfectly right, and I am entirely in the wrong. The fact is, I lost my temper."

"I don't wonder," said Norton, smiling. "I was fearfully annoying, I expect. I quite understand your feeling very sore; but it's no good feeling sore. It's no good having grievances. There is no specific ill-will to you, not even in the inscrutable mind of Providence. But you can't beat troubles by playing their game and having feelings. The magnanimous person always wins!"

"Well, I've done what you advise. I have asked if they will have us both to luncheon on Sunday."

"Excellent!" said Norton, "and look here, I'll play up too. I'll take them all on—the heavy father, the governess, and the little Missy. They shall not come nigh thee—some of my long stories, my choicest reminiscences—I'll bring out my puzzles—the monkey on the pulley, and 'Where does the day begin?' You shall see. I'll have them all writing on bits of paper before I have done, and you shall have a clear field."

Walter consulted his mother about the proposed expedition to the Manor. He hardly knew what to expect. But after talking to her a few minutes, he suddenly realized with surprise that her only disappointment was that she was not going herself.

"But would you come too, mother? That would be splendid; then I should feel really comfortable."

"Do you think I ought to go, darling? I am afraid I should find it too much for me. I really don't think I could bear to look into the library and not see dear papa sitting there!" and Mrs. Garnet's appealing eyes filled with slow tears.

"Of course they would not expect you to do that, mother dear. But just think what an honour they would feel it to be, and how happy it would make them."

"Do you really think that? I should not like them to feel hurt at my staying away; and Mr. Worsley is such a good man—dear papa had such a high opinion of him; and dear Helen has been so kind to me. If you think they would really like me to go."

"I don't think that you could possibly please them more than by going."

"I should rather like to see what they have made of the drawing-room," said Mrs. Garnet, musing, "and what they have put in the alcove, in the place of my Italian cabinet;

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you remember how well it fitted? I have sometimes wondered if we ought to have taken it away; and then they have put in a new kitchen-range—I should like to see that. They might be glad of my advice. The chimney is a very awkward one. Dear papa used to think that the big elm-tree took off the draught. Yes, I should certainly like to go, if no one would think it odd. I don't feel sure that Petty would like my going. Petty is such a faithful creature; I don't know what I should do without her. I must certainly speak to Petty first."

"Shall I fetch her, mother?"

"Yes, do, darling. I wouldn't like to distress Petty; she often says she can't bear to think of Marker having her room. Have you noticed how Petty always talks about the Manor as if it had been hers? I suppose I ought to check her, but it is just her loyalty."

Walter fetched Petty, who adored him.

"Mamma is thinking of going to the Manor," he said.

"Your mamma won't like that, Master Walter. It would be too much for her."

"But I want her to go, Petty; and I want you to encourage her—you have such an influence with her."

"Well, Master Walter, I'll say what I can. I have often thought she would be the better for a look at our old house. She would see for herself the mess they have made of it, by all accounts, but that's better than imagining things."

"Quite right, Petty. She had better go and get it over. Don't let her give way. You know how to manage her better than any of us."

"I know my place, Master Walter, but I shall be all for her going—she wants a nice little change, and I'll say my word as respectful as I know how."

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Mr. Worsley's reply to their suggestion satisfied even Mrs. Garnet. "He could not have written more kindly, if it had been the Queen that was going. Mr. Norton, I hope you don't think it is unfeeling of me to go? I feel it very much; indeed I should hardly have liked to go if my faithful old maid hadn't begged me to go. She said she had often thought of suggesting it. It quite took me by surprise. She doesn't like the idea of the changes they have made in the kitchen. But she said I had better get it over, and that I mustn't give way. I am afraid dear Walter doesn't quite like my going, though he was very good about it. He thought it would be too much for me; but I felt it would please Mr. Worsley, who is such a good man. I depend very much on his advice, just as my dear husband did."

Mr. Worsley drove his car down himself, and evidently felt it to be a very solemn occasion. Mrs. Garnet was in high spirits, and asked among other things what they had found to put in the alcove, where her Italian cabinet used to stand, and whether the kitchen chimney still smoked. Mr. Worsley said almost tremulously that they had made none but the most necessary alterations, and had done their best to preserve the old atmosphere of the house, which had a quality, he said, that was both endearing and impressive—"a home-like dignity, in fact."

When they drew up at the gate-house, Helen, who had evidently been waiting for them, came quickly out to meet them. Walter could see that she, at all events, was somewhat dreading the occasion. But Mrs. Garnet enfolded her in a warm embrace, and embraced Clare, who was obviously terrified, and talked very graciously, with many nods and smiles, to Miss Haden. And really it was quite like a little royal progress, with Mr. Worsley, bareheaded,

apologizing at every point, conducting Mrs. Garnet down the flagged pathway, with Helen and Walter behind, and Norton making mild fun of Clare. Helen looked very much moved.

"Walter," she said, in an undertone, "it is really splendid of Mrs. Garnet to come, and you too. I can't say how kind I think it. I know it must be dreadful, but I don't think I have ever seen my father so pleased!"

"Oh, Helen, such a little thing!" said Walter; "but you will let me get a talk with you, won't you?" Helen nodded; and the cortège reached the house.

The afternoon was a great triumph for all concerned. Mrs. Garnet forgot her affliction for the time being in the extreme excitement of seeing the arrangements of the house. She was frankly disappointed that the drawing-room was so much the same. She "just peeped" into most of the rooms, which meant a long and exhaustive survey with abundance of argument.

Mr. Worsley deferred to all her wishes, was convinced by all her arguments, said "as your tenant" on every possible opportunity, and made notes with a pencil on the back of an envelope. Norton was as good as his word, and as Mrs. Goring had been summoned after lunch to attend Mrs. Garnet, Helen was able to escape with Walter for an hour. She had said something to him again as to the sacrifice she felt sure he had made in coming.

"But, Helen, it's just as bad for you; we have turned you out of your house, and yet you are not supposed to have any feelings about that."

"Ah, but it is different, though I did have some pretty heartbroken hours when I went round and said good-bye to everything. But women are only adjuncts; they are

like Ruth, they go where someone else goes. *You* had every reason to expect to be undisturbed here."

"I don't feel it very much—not nearly as much as I expected. I don't think I care very much about the past or the future. One can't drag about an ever-increasing load of sacred associations."

"One must be grateful, at least; but the curious thing is that I now seem to myself to have been perfectly happy in Thurston. Yet I was often very unhappy there."

"What about?" asked he.

"Oh, I don't know—I didn't mean to talk about that—people mostly. I hate things going wrong; all the excuses that people make for being cross with each other, when it is merely one's own fault."

"I shouldn't have thought it was often your fault."

"That's the odd thing. People are as vain of their faults as they are of their good points. They prefer their faults to be thought serious. Don't you think that three-quarters of the trouble in the world comes from people wanting to be thought bigger than they are? They like to feel that they matter."

"I hadn't even thought about it, but I expect it is true."

"I don't think people amuse and interest you so much as they do me. You expect to see something fine in them."

"I find a great many people very tiresome, Helen."

"Oh, you can get a great deal of fun by imagining exactly what they are going to say and do about everything. Clare's naughtiness, for instance—you would not believe how aggravating she can be—and Miss Haden's appeals to her better nature. It is as good as a play. Miss Haden has a great idea of her own influence; but they are both really only trying to make themselves felt."

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"Do you see through everybody like this?" said Walter, smiling.

"I wish I did. But Clare and Miss Haden are on simple lines—a room upstairs and a room downstairs. But some people are like corridors and winding passages and corkscrew stairs. My father—I never know what is going on in his mind."

"I don't think I want to explore people's minds unless I am likely to find something surprising and beautiful."

"I think people's characters can be beautiful without their minds being beautiful. Do you mind if I say this, Walter? I think your mother is like that. She talks about very small things very often, and goes back again and again to the same thing; but I think her affection and kindness and generosity are *most* beautiful; she understands people better by loving them than most people do by analysing them. Look at Mr. and Mrs. Goring. Mr. Goring will find thirty reasons for disapproving of someone, and add them all up; while Mrs. Goring will have no reason at all for approving of them—but she is generally right, and he is always wrong."

"I think we take rather different views of beauty, Helen. It is the one thing I believe myself to be always looking out for and seldom finding."

"And I think that all lovable people are beautiful; and without loveliness they cannot be beautiful."

"What is loveliness?" asked he.

"Oh, I'm no good at definition—something that makes you trust them, cling to them, want to see them, feel safe with them!"

Walter was silent for a minute. Then he said, "I wish I could see things as you do; I am *sure* you are right. But you seem to be talking about something which is hidden

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from me. I don't think I have got any of the qualities you speak of; you must be patient with me."

"Walter, you mustn't talk like that, as if you were down in the depths. You have got all these things, only you don't seem able to let yourself go."

"I don't quite know what you mean," said Walter. "I can get on with people in a way, but when it comes to making friends, I say to myself, 'Do I, after all, want this person on my back, like Sindbad the sailor?' I feel he will bore me, he will presume on his acquaintance, he will want more than I can give. Is one bound to give anyone as much of oneself as he cares to ask? Mayn't one choose one's friends? Must one accept them ready-made?"

"I am afraid I haven't got any rules," said Helen. "One doesn't always admire people, of course, but one may pity them, or like a part of them, or be interested in trying to disentangle their difficulties."

"I am afraid I haven't got the missionary spirit."

"Now that's very unfair, to try to make me out as a kind of professional handmaiden. I don't do this on principle; I do it because it interests me."

"Then if it doesn't interest one, one need not do it," said Walter.

"I can't beat you at logic," said Helen, laughing. "I suppose women are illogical. It's their way of doing things. I don't say it is the only way."

"How idiotic of me to talk like this," said Walter, "when I want you to like me, and really care very little how or why you do it. Don't throw me overboard just yet. I really want to know. I see that you know how to deal with people and that I don't; and anyhow I am going to have to deal with people whether I like it or not."

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"You will do it all right, Walter," said Helen. "But I hope you won't analyse your young men too much—it is better simply to like them. I don't think mistakes of affection do much harm. It is much better—at least I think so—to trust an untrustworthy person, than to pile up a little case, like Mr. Goring, against a well-meaning person."

"Well, I have been quite tiresome enough for to-day," said Walter. "Tell me, how do you like the Manor? Is it lovable?"

"I don't know," said Helen, "it's lovely enough. I never saw such a house, and I love the views and the woods. But I don't quite feel at ease yet. I have a curious feeling as if there was something or somebody about who doesn't like the change. It's a curious feeling—probably only my imagination; but there have been a good many Garnets here, perhaps not all very reasonable people. I don't feel it is a dangerous or hurtful influence, but more a kind of dull opposition. Perhaps they will feel we are to be tolerated now that you have been here."

"I don't quite like all this," said Walter, looking uneasily at Helen. "I have never felt anything like that anywhere. Surely it is only a fancy?"

"Oh, I expect so," said Helen; "it isn't a thing to worry about. It's my own evil conscience."

"Does anyone else feel this? I do so want you to be happy here."

"Father doesn't; he's as pleased as Punch. But I don't want you to think any more of it, Walter. It isn't anything definite at all. It isn't a horror. It is rather the sort of oppression which one feels if someone is ill in the house. It is as if someone wanted to be left alone—not disliking the particular intruders, but all intruders."

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"You must tell me if this feeling goes off, Helen."

"I will; it's a comfort to have mentioned it to you, and I feel relieved already."

They went back to the house, and found the tour of inspection almost ended. Mrs. Garnet had thoroughly approved of the kitchen range, and was wondering why they had never replaced the old one. She had been much struck by the duvets on the beds, and she had, as she said to Mr. Worsley, "plenty to think about."

Helen turned off to see about tea, and Walter was left alone in the long flagged corridor into which the rooms all opened. A sudden spasm of uneasiness came over him. He felt as he had felt more than once in his childhood when he had been noisy in the corridor, and his father's study door had opened, and his father had come out and looked at him in silence, and had gone back to his study, as was his wont, without a word.

IX

NORTON had gone away, much to Mrs. Garnet's regret, and an elderly cousin, a wizened and trenchant little lady, had come to stay with them. Cousin Jane Harrison lived on a small income at Tonbridge, and was only too glad to give her servant a holiday without the misery of having to take one herself in solitude. She acted as the recipient of most of Mrs. Garnet's confidences and proved an excellent listener, while she on the other hand talked to Mrs. Garnet with much emphasis of household economies, and the lack of cash, which she met by what she called dodges. "Jane is really a very shrewd woman," Mrs. Garnet would say; and she admired Jane's contrivances all the more because she herself felt incapable of exercising them.

Walter got into the way of going up to the Manor in the afternoon for tea, and saw Helen very constantly, and she warned him carefully of their occasional visitors and lawn-tennis parties. But it was a considerable distance to the Manor, and the road was a steep one, so that as Helen confided to Walter, she saw a good deal less of some of the old Thurston circle than she liked. Her father seemed rather pleased by this than otherwise.

But there was an afternoon when Walter walked by chance into a party of visitors, and became aware that his presence acted rather as a wet-blanket. He however

bestirred himself, talked diligently, and extracted a certain satisfaction out of the fact that Helen was so infinitely superior in all respects to her second-rate associates. How could she tolerate them, he thought? But the singular result of his cheerful and unembarrassed behaviour was not put down to his credit in Thurston circles. It was a little adventure to meet him—the dispossessed heir in the halls of his ancestors. But Thurston sentiment required something a little more romantic. If Walter had been silent and abstracted, gazing moodily out of the window, he would have fulfilled all reasonable expectations; as it was, he talked and laughed, fetched his companion another cup of tea, and behaved in fact most disappointingly like anyone else.

But Walter found his evenings more difficult than anything else. If dinner had been a time of eager talk and argument, he would have gladly retired to his books and papers. But Mrs. Garnet was not an easy person to acquiesce in listening to. It seemed to Walter indeed that she must have been at great pains to repress, in the Manor days, an exuberant volubility. Then her whole talk was framed to draw the Squire out, and get him safely and complacently started. Now she seemed just to open a sluice in her brain, and let her memories and comments bubble through. She could not be interrupted, and it was not possible to disconnect the mind and to think of other things. She claimed a sort of agonized attention; and Walter, to do him credit, made no attempt to silence or discourage her.

A small ailment, however, made him better acquainted with young Dr. Bowlby, who was living as a bachelor in very uncomfortable lodgings. Walter asked him in a mood of casual friendliness if he would not come in some evening at ten o'clock and smoke. He responded so eagerly

and came so soon that Walter at first rather repented of his overture.

Dr. Bowlby was the son of a clergyman, who had found it very hard to provide his son with an adequate technical education. But it had somehow been done, though Bowlby's account of his school and college days, lived under a humiliating sense of poverty, made Walter realize how fortunate he himself had been. He was a big strongly built young man with rough brown hair, a somewhat inexpressive face, but with friendly and appealing eyes. He was carelessly dressed, and Walter wondered whether it would be impertinent to tell him that if he cultivated a more decorous appearance, he would probably meet with more success. His patients were mostly of the poorer class, among whom he had the reputation of great carefulness and attention. He seemed to have no diversions and no amusements. Walter found him at first rather gruff and awkward, but he gradually became aware that Bowlby was an enthusiast, and had certain theories of his own about the art of healing which seemed novel and interesting.

"The great mistake many of us make," Bowlby said one night, "is to have a cut and dried system. We don't study the personal factor enough. We ought somehow to get to know what our patients are in ordinary life, and the worst of illness is that it tends to reduce most people to a uniformly timid and egotistical level."

"But I suppose you have to follow certain accepted lines?"

"Yes, up to a point; there are a few obvious specifics. But some people respond eagerly to drugs, and in other cases they don't touch the imagination at all. To get a patient to bring his own healing power into action is the secret."

Cressage

"But is it a question of will? I thought it was only in books that people willed themselves back to life."

"It isn't a question of will at all, to my mind," said Bowlby. "Has it ever struck you that in all of us there is a current of something flowing in the background, which seldom comes obviously to the surface at all? The mind is like—well, it is like one of those water-beetles you see in ponds with a double-scutting apparatus. It moves about, it keeps dry, it has very little to do with the fluid underneath."

"But surely the mind is an index of the character?"

"An index, yes—it shows sometimes which way the wind is blowing. But I don't think the *mind* has much to do with the body. One has patients who know perfectly well what is wrong with them—some self-indulgence perhaps—and are quite reasonable about it in talk, but they simply don't or can't give up the thing. They even delude themselves. I had a man once to whom port was simply poison. I told him to cut it off, and he said that it was nothing to him. But what do you think he did? He had a couple of glasses every evening to reward him for his own abstemiousness."

"But isn't the whole unit all tied together by something?"

"Yes, you die, of course, if certain things are touched—but I believe you die piecemeal. A man is about as much one being as a village is. If the keeper of the village shop, with whom everyone has running accounts, comes to grief, the whole place rather comes to grief. But I think that a man is more like an ant-hill or a coral-island, and that every bit of him has a separate vitality. If you take the heart out of an animal it will go on moving for hours, even days, when the animal itself is dead. I believe it probably retains a certain consciousness. A human being seems

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to me more like a collection of things that had agreed to live together, a community, in fact, like the happy families that live together in an old wheelk."

"But there must be some one central impulse of life?"

"A predominant impulse perhaps—hardly more."

"But what about this current you spoke of—what is it?"

"Ah, well, what?" said Bowlby. "If we knew that, we should know everything. It seems to me rather like a stream flowing under a bridge. You look down at it, and you think and speak of it as the same stream. It looks the same, it keeps to the same limits more or less, it has the same sort of consistency, but it is never the same stream for two minutes together."

"But what on earth *is* the human current, then?"

"I don't know—some people call it life, some people call it God—but it isn't *in* us only; it is something passing through us."

"But I feel my identity to be a perfectly definite thing—it doesn't alter much—it is different from other people's identities," said Walter.

"But are you sure that you are not judging by the mind, the perceptions, the sensations—all the things which are definitely your own?"

"I may be. But I don't see where this all takes us."

"Nor do I. But one must be on the look-out for self-delusion. One must trust instinct more than reason—I don't mean the instincts of which one is afraid and ashamed, but the strong, innocent, healthy instincts. And, after all, it doesn't much matter whether you trust them or not, for that is the way you will behave, whether you like it or no."

"But why not trust the reason?"

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"Because it won't take you anywhere. That's the mistake you intellectual fellows commit, if I may say so; and that is also the reason why many of you are so discontented. Your reason kicks, scratches, bites. The point is to have a general harmony. Some people trust the animal, some the reason, some the imagination, some what they call their religion. I am not sure that the last don't get nearest to it."

"I am surprised; I thought you were a materialist," said Walter.

"Oh, no; I'm a desperate idealist. If I was not, I should find medicine a hopeless trade; as it is, I think it the most interesting thing in the world."

"If my soul is ever in trouble, I shall come to you."

Bowlby looked at him for a moment and then said, somewhat gravely, "But you *are* in trouble, my dear Garnet. I saw it the moment I set eyes on you. Mind, I am not going to attempt to scare you. You are physically as sound as a bell, and you are a very tough fellow who may live to be ninety. But I am not going to ask any questions. You may take it that I am right."

"This is very strange," said Walter. "Of course, as you know, I have had a good deal of what is called trouble lately; but I have been constantly surprised to find how easy it is to put up with, compared with what I had imagined."

"Yes, because you are used to self-repression. You have tyrannized over yourself with your reason all your life. I don't expect you have ever broken down."

"I have been fairly respectable," said Walter. "I suppose you mean I have been rather a prig?"

"No, I shouldn't call you a prig. I doubt if you have cared enough to be that. You have got plenty of *laissez faire*. But look here, I am not going to sit in judgment.

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You are a very good specimen of a human being, but I suspect you of being over-civilized."

"I am a very hard-used man," said Walter, laughing. "All my friends seem to have a different fault to find with me."

"Probably you are waking up," said Bowlby, "and the thing, whatever it is—we called it the current—in your friends, is making signals to the current in you. But I mustn't deal in these fancies. What would my patients do if they heard me talking like this?—but it is the way I help to cure them."

A few days later, Walter, talking to Helen, asked her if she knew anything of Dr. Bowlby.

"Only by sight. I rather like the look of him. He looks like a dog awakened from a nap, and glad to find himself alive again."

"I have been a good deal interested by him," said Walter. "But I think he is very lonely and very poor; his lodgings are beastly. Can't you do something for him?"

"Of course; I will speak to father. We will have him to lunch or tea, if he will come. Father is developing a sense of responsibility about everyone in Thurston now, which he did not possess when he lived among them. But I doubt if Dr. Bowlby will consent to be patronized."

Presently she said to him, "I feel rather a beast about the Thurstonians, Walter. I seem to be dropping out altogether."

"I am going to suggest something," said Walter. "I often think my mother wants a companion at times. She is very fond of you. Wouldn't you come and stay with us for a week before I go to Oxford? You could play about with all your little friends. Of course I don't pretend I am doing this for my mother's sake only, though I think

it would do her no end of good. But I should enjoy it quite tremendously. At present all our talks seem snatched out of the jaws of the lion."

Helen smiled and said, "Yes, I think father would let me go. He is very much afraid of our seeming stuck-up; and Miss Haden and Clare would be enchanted to be left in charge. Clare loves to be hostess, and Miss Haden thinks she has a natural genius for presiding at tea-tables."

"It would be simply perfect," said Walter.

Walter told his mother, perhaps not quite frankly, that Helen would be glad to be a little nearer to her old friends for a few days, adding, "And she loves being with you; why not ask her to stay for a week?"

"Dear girl," said Mrs. Garnet, "but hadn't it better wait till you go back to Oxford?"

"No, mother," said Walter, still rather diplomatically. "I often feel that I am not much of a companion for you; but I must prepare my work for next term, and I should be happier if you had someone you really liked with you."

Mrs. Garnet fell joyfully into the snare; Mr. Worsley overwhelmed her with thanks for the honour proffered; and it was a pleasant day for Walter, when Helen, having arrived in the afternoon, slipped into the drawing-room for tea, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

"Now you will have your turn, Helen," said Mrs. Garnet, encouragingly. "I saw what you had made of our house; you will see what we have done with yours. I won't say I think it improved, but it is wonderful how home-like it seems. No," went on Mrs. Garnet, in high delight, shaking her finger at Helen. "I see what you are thinking—how selfish it was of me to take the Italian cabinet away from the alcove at the Manor. I have tried to persuade

myself to let you have it, but I can't part with it, though it was a perfect fit."

The evening passed very harmoniously. "Is there anything," said Helen once to Mrs. Garnet, "that you don't notice and remember?"

"It's very dear of you to say that," said Mrs. Garnet, "but I'm afraid it is all I am fit for now. When I came here I meant to become quite a reader. I hardly ever opened a book at the Manor; but I used to like some parts of Tennyson—and then there was Tupper, whom your father couldn't bear—but I always thought he said several true things. But somehow I never find time even now—so many people ask my advice."

When they dispersed for bed, Mrs. Garnet said to Helen, "You must just go and peep into your old room, dear, if you can bear its being so smoky. I know Walter wants to show it you. But you must get a good long night. I never sleep well in a strange house—but I must not forget that this isn't strange to you."

Helen went with Walter to the study. She uttered a cry of surprise. "But, Walter, I took all my things away, and yet it looks almost exactly the same."

Walter laughed. "I liked your room the moment I saw it, and I have kept the same arrangement—that's all."

"Yes, I liked the arrangement, but my things were so shabby—and now it looks exactly what I should have liked it to look like."

They sat down, and Helen was persuaded to smoke a cigarette. Walter looked at her, as she sat opposite him in her dark dress free from ornament, one slender foot dangling over her knee. A sudden sense of curious delight came over him, and yet it seemed to him as if he had been thus a hundred times before. Helen's eyes dwelt for a

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moment on the fire; she lifted them and smiled across at him. "What amazing things happen!" she said; "if I had been told a year ago, when I was scribbling in here or trying to put things in order, that I should be sitting here smoking with what I then considered the most formidable young man in the neighbourhood, and calling him by his Christian name, and talking to him as if I had known him all my life, I should have said—I don't know what I should have said. Yet here I am and here are you!"

"Yes," said Walter, "and you are going to talk to me for a couple of good hours. I don't sleep very much, and I'm sure you don't care whether you sleep or not."

"What will your mother say?"

"Oh, I will stride upstairs coughing loudly, and you will just glide into your room like a bird of the dawn."

X

EARLY one morning Helen was awakened in the dusk by Miss Haden, very much in *déshabillé*, who told her that her father had been taken ill, and that she had better come at once to see him. She got up in haste, with that curious sense that a sudden shock, soaking backwards into memory, brings with it—the feeling that a trouble is somehow familiar. In a few minutes she was in her father's room. Mr. Worsley was lying propped up by pillows, his eyes closed, his face very pale and streaming with sweat, struggling for breath. There was a sense of something very tragic to Helen in her decorous and self-possessed father being thus brought into ugly contact with primal forces. Mr. Worsley's whole life had been a constant effort to keep primal forces at arm's length. Helen stood quietly beside him. A moment later he opened his eyes for a moment, gave her a nod and a little smile, and betook himself again to his secret wrestlings. Miss Haden had sent the car for the doctor. They had given him a little brandy, but there seemed nothing else that could be done.

There were candles lighted beside the bed, but Mr. Worsley with a little gesture indicated that they should be extinguished, and a further gesture was interpreted by Helen to mean that he wanted air. She went and pulled the curtain aside and opened the window. The air came fitfully in from the garden, fresh and pure and filled with a faint scent, so it seemed to her, of dreaming woods. She went

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back and sat again beside the bed, and saw that the sky was growing pale, with faint streaks of a rusty orange betokening the coming of the day.

A great tenderness filled her mind, even though she realized how little she knew of her father. He had never said a word to her of any love, but his invariable kindness and reasonableness, his avoidance of all fault-finding, his patient laborious self-effacing life, gave her a feeling of beauty and order, even though she could not imagine what his real motives were, or why he devoted himself month after month, with hardly a holiday, to detailed work of a dreary order. He was no philanthropist, and yet she did not think him a mercenary man. She knew that he was rich, but he had very little taste for luxury or even comfort. He had some ideal, no doubt, which he was striving to fulfil, something which he wanted to secure. Yet she wondered now if he had ever loved anyone for themselves, and whether his liberality, which was great and constant, was all built on the same unknown hope. She vaguely asked herself whether if she knew what his aims were she would respect or sympathize with them; but she had the same feeling of tenderness for him as she would have had for a sick child, whose pleasures, so untiringly pursued, had been interrupted by pain and malaise.

The dawn slowly brightened up the sky, when Mr. Worsley turned to her a little, and in a low hollow voice said, "I think I am a little better." A moment later there were steps in the passage, and Dr. Bowlby entered the room. His robust and smiling air, and a certain sense of freshness and strength about him, brought Helen a sense of confidence. He gave her a little bow, and passed at once to Mr. Worsley's side. Then he turned to Helen, interpreting some glance or gesture of Mr. Worsley's, and said, "I think, Miss

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Worsley, you had better leave the room for a few minutes. The attack is passing off, and I do not think you have any reason to be alarmed."

Helen returned to her room and made a hasty toilet. When she came down again, she found Dr. Bowlby giving Miss Haden some directions. He turned to her, and said, "You need not be anxious, Miss Worsley. Your father has had a heart-attack. It does not wholly surprise me; but he is naturally a strong man. You must just keep him quiet for a few days, but he will soon, I hope, be about again. I have told Miss Haden what to do, and I will send up a nurse for the next few days, as he ought to have someone within call at night. But he much dislikes the idea of a nurse, so we will make her as invisible as possible. I will come up again this evening, but I don't think the attack will recur; and in the course of the next few days we will have a little talk as to the future. Your father is suffering from continuous work; we must try if we can manage to make him a little less conscientious. Unfortunately he has no hobbies, I think?"

"No," said Helen, smiling; "his idea of resting is to do his ordinary work in an arm-chair."

Dr. Bowlby nodded. "I would not leave him too much to himself to-day. He will probably doze for part of the day; but you had better suggest reading the paper to him this evening, when he will be more wakeful."

It was a great load off Helen's mind. She went to find Clare, and to her surprise found her in a state of great grief and consternation.

"Is papa going to die, Helen?"

"No, darling, of course not. He will be about in a few days."

Clare burst into a fit of sobbing. "Don't let me see him just now," she said; "I could not bear it."

Cressage

"Oh, if he asks for you, you must just look in; but he doesn't look different, and there is nothing to be afraid of."

"You aren't pretending, are you, Helen? I heard Miss Haden say to Sarah that we must be prepared for the worst."

"Well, the worst is that he will be in bed for a few days."

"Oh, Helen, how I hate things *happening*; it seems to spoil everything."

"We shall go on just as usual; the only difference is that papa will be in bed instead of at the office."

"I'm awfully sorry for papa, of course," said Clare.

"I will tell him you said that. I don't expect he will want to see anyone till to-morrow. And I am sure he would wish you to go on just as usual."

Later in the day Mr. Worsley was much better after a sleep. Helen suggested reading the paper to him. "Thank you, my dear, I should like that," he said.

But in the middle of the reading he stopped her, and said he would like to talk a little. Helen said that the doctor did not wish him to talk much or tire himself.

"It will do me good to talk. I feel quite myself again."

Then he lay for so long silent that she thought he had dropped asleep.

"Helen," he suddenly said, "I was very ill this morning—very ill indeed. I felt—I do not know how to describe it—as though I were falling into a great gulf. I could not get my breath, and I went on falling. I was not in pain. And now I feel almost myself again, only very tired. But of course it might recur."

"Dr. Bowlby said you had been working too hard, papa."

"I know; I have felt it coming on; but I have no interest but my work."

"Can't you leave a little more to Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, no doubt. But what should I do without it?"

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Of course I shall be prudent. I do not want to die until I have brought certain things about. In fact, I do not want to die at all; but strange to say, I was not afraid this morning."

"When you had that strange sensation?"

"Yes. I was not afraid, though I do not think of myself as a brave man. It seemed natural. I was almost sorry to come back to life. I have not enjoyed my life very much. I sometimes think it is a mistake not to enjoy it more. I would like you to enjoy it!"

"I do, papa."

"Yes, my dear, I hope so. But I want to feel—how can I express it?—that you have a definite place in the world, a definite life before you. One must have a life of some kind. It is amusing when one is young to have leisure and happiness; but it is not enough. A man has his work, but a woman's work is a makeshift thing. Women ought to marry. I have seldom known an unmarried woman who was happy."

"Oh, papa—Miss Haden is a very contented woman, and Miss Jardine and heaps more."

"I do not consider them happy—they are at best occupied. But you, Helen, are fit for great happiness, for a high position, and you would make your husband and children happy. I very much want to see you married, my dear."

"One has got to fall in love, papa. I would do anything to please you, but you would not wish me to marry anyone who asked me."

"No, of course not. But I should like you to marry Walter Garnet. You like him, do you not?"

"Yes, papa, very much. He is the closest to me of all my friends; but I don't think he has any idea of marrying me or anyone."

Cressage

"He no doubt thinks he is too poor. But money does not matter, Helen. You will have a very considerable fortune."

"But all that is a reason against his marrying me. Besides, I do not know that I want to marry him. Other people may be different, but I could not marry anyone unless I felt that I could not bear to live without him."

"That is too transcendental, my dear. Marriage is a very ordinary thing; it is not a great mystery. You seem to me to ask too much. Some of the happiest marriages I know have been made without—without that feeling of which you speak."

"I can't argue this, papa."

"I do not expect you to do so, my dear. Perhaps you dislike my having spoken so plainly, but that would be a false delicacy considering how near I have been to dying. At all events you know what my dearest wishes are, and that all my greatest hopes are concentrated upon you."

"And what about poor Clare, papa?"

"Clare will certainly please herself. I shall provide generously for her, but she has not got the stability of character which I recognize in you. Clare would not be fit for a big position. But if you married Walter, you would be able to take almost any position."

"But, papa," said Helen, "I do not want to say anything to vex you, and I do not set up my opinion against your experience, but I do not think I could arrange my life with a view to my position in the world. It is something different that I want."

"You are young, my dear. But believe me, a stable position is a very tranquillizing thing; it is a sustaining thought to have it in the background whatever happens. What would poor Mrs. Garnet be without her position?"

Cressage

"I doubt if she thinks about it at all, papa."

"No, she is very unworldly; but other people do; and it is a very real source of happiness to stand high in the estimation of the world."

"We mustn't talk any more, papa—not till you are a little stronger. Shall I read any more?"

"No, dear, I thank you. I believe I can sleep a little. Has the nurse arrived?"

"I will go and see."

"You will remember what I have said, Helen? You will at least give it a thought? I have great confidence in you, my dear."

"Of course, papa. You don't know how much I wish to please you."

"I am sure of it, my dear."

The talk was not wholly a surprise to Helen. She had long divined that her father wished her to marry Walter. But what did surprise her was that her father should have spoken so openly, and that a man should come back from the gates of death with so very conventional a message. She had an inkling now of what he held most sacred. She did not despise it, she did not resist it, she only wondered; and a great pity came over her at the thought of her father's repressed, anxious, self-effacing life, so freely devoted to others, yet with the central light burning so clear and strong in so very commonplace a shrine. But behind it all lay the comfort—just then a supreme one—of the fact that her father had revealed in this dry and passionless utterance, that he loved her, thought about her, schemed for her; and when Dr. Bowlby came to report to her that he was very much better, and was regaining his strength, he was surprised to find her in tears.

XI

TWO days later she had a talk with Dr. Bowlby. His manner was extraordinarily kind and reassuring. He told her that her father would be liable to a recurrence of such attacks, though he might live for many years with due precaution. He pointed out that the perpetual strain of work was telling on him. "Your father puts a good deal of himself into his work—it is a personal responsibility, not an impersonal concern"; that the shock of Mr. Garnet's death and the ensuing revelations had evidently deeply affected him; and that he must, if possible, limit his work, take more holidays, and be freed from all anxiety.

"Your father," he said, "has come to an age when he wants a personal interest in life. He has neglected this in a very self-sacrificing way. But though his work has interested him, he needs some new satisfaction—some pleasant subject, some interest of his own to which his thoughts might constantly recur."

Helen felt a sudden trustful confidence in this rugged and burly man, who was not content with mere empty reassurance, but had some real understanding of the inner conditions of her father's mind.

"But what am I to do?" she said. "My father has no private tastes—he does not care for games or sport or books or art. Dr. Bowlby, would it surprise you if I told you that my father showed me more of his mind in a half-hour's

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talk the day he was ill than I have ever had before. I almost felt as if I were talking to a stranger."

"No," said Dr. Bowlby, "I am not surprised. Your father is a very self-contained man. He no doubt had—these attacks carry with them an undue amount of mental alarm—a very strong prevision of approaching death. I have known cases like it. But did what he said give you no clue as to how you might help to distract his mind from his profession?"

"I can't say that it did," said Helen. "But it is rather difficult for me to explain. It was mostly about my own future that he talked."

"I quite understand," said Dr. Bowlby with a friendly smile. "Your father's work would naturally develop in his mind a strong family feeling. These instincts are mysterious things, and I think he has a certain feudal instinct; he has seemed to me more at home, more natural, more expansive, in this place than he ever did as a professional man at Thurston. Well, you must encourage him in this. Let him get a pony and ride about among his woods and farms. The contemplation of one's own acres has a very sustaining influence, and promotes longevity. A squire who loves his estate—the earth and all that comes out of it—is generally a long-lived man. Human beings come and go, but the land goes on."

"Yes," said Helen, laughing. "I might do that; but my father is not an easy man to dictate to. He knows his own mind."

"But you must try to have a few more visitors here," said Dr. Bowlby. "That is a point in which you could influence him. You need not go far afield—your own friends and relations. What is wanted is something a little patriarchal."

Cressage

"I see the sort of thing," said Helen.

"I don't want him to be bored," said Dr. Bowlby; "but it will amuse you, or ought to, to get him to think that such ideas are his own. It is a very pleasant pastime to put ideas into people's minds, and to persuade them that they have originated them. It is what I spend the greater part of my life in doing. It has a very curative effect. You need not be Jesuitical. The power of suggestion is incalculably strong. A doctor spends most of his time in linking up two ends of a current—and not only doctors, but all the people who are worth anything in the world. You have probably done it hundreds of times without noticing it. On the other hand, a great deal of my work consists in undoing the harm done on the same lines by silly people. It is a maxim of mine that silent and smiling people disseminate health, chatterers disseminate disease."

"But what about smiling chatterers?" said Helen.

"Ah, that's the deadliest sort of all! But seriously, Miss Helen, you and I must put our heads together about this. Your father, though he has had no programme, has done a great deal of good in his time—the best kind of good, such as is done by honest people who work and mind their own business. You can do a great deal to relieve the strain, and I will suggest whatever I can. I only wish that most of my patients were as well worth preserving."

"That is a rash remark," said Helen, with a smile.

"Ah, I know to whom it is safe to tell the truth," said Dr. Bowlby.

Mr. Worsley recovered with great rapidity, but he did not renew his confidence to Helen. There was, in fact, at first, in his manner towards Helen, something like the

consciousness of sharing a guilty secret. But Helen knew what her father was feeling. A shy and reticent man with unconfessed visions of his own, he had for once, under the fear of death, laid bare his desires to his daughter. She did not think that he exactly regretted it, but it had left on his mind the impression as it were of some almost indecent accident. There was, however, from that day a shade of tenderness in his manner to Helen never shown before, for which she was grateful. He talked to her about Clare, whose flightiness made him uneasy; but this was the nearest he ever came to intimacy. Helen's own half-pitying fondness for her father increased. His vision, as it had revealed itself to her, seemed so small and forlorn an image to crown the top of an edifice so laborious and so reserved.

Meanwhile Mrs. Garnet, perhaps exhausted by sociability, had been ordered by the doctor to have a fortnight of sea air and quiet, and Mrs. Goring volunteered her company. Mr. Goring, after long reflection as to whether he should accompany them, decided that it would be too great an interruption to his spiritual routine to risk it. This did not suit Walter's plans at all. He had work to do, he had nowhere particular to go to, and to transfer his books to a seaside lodging, with the prospect of his mother's unlimited company, was not congenial to him. He consulted Mrs. Goring, who said frankly that his going was out of the question. That he would be sadly in their way, as they intended to indulge themselves as to hours and meals in every respect, and that she would undertake to explain this to Mrs. Garnet, which she did with such cogency that his mother besought him not to come with considerable emphasis, on the ground that the doctor had ordered her a complete rest and that she must on no account have more than a single companion.

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Walter accordingly prepared to remain at home for a fortnight of solitude; but Helen, when he next saw her, said that she had something to propose. Would he not transfer himself to the Manor, and occupy the gate house rooms? Her father was still unable to return to work, and it would be not only a kindness to him to give him some company; but she knew that there was still a few matters of business which he would like to discuss with Walter. "I needn't say how much I should like it," said Helen. "In fact since my father has been ill, I am myself very much in want of a little change of mind. I have begun to feel like a hospital nurse, and am learning the secret of a bright meaningless smile, which haunts me whenever I look in the glass. You will really be quite undisturbed. Father only comes down for luncheon, and rests in the afternoon, so that I can walk with you at any time."

Walter consented eagerly. He had an uneasy sense that he had been behaving badly to Helen; and accordingly when he had seen his mother and Mrs. Goring off at the station, in the midst of a scene of unparalleled fuss about bags, boxes, fond adieux and forgotten commissions, he put his books together with a great sense of relief, and was driven up to the Manor in the Worsley car in time for luncheon.

Mr. Worsley was not feeling quite as well as usual, so Walter went up to see him in his room. There seemed a certain desolateness about the arrangements. The room itself was prim and unadorned. On the table by the bed were bundles of business papers, and a book, with a marker in it, of a solid kind. Mr. Worsley pressed Walter's hand, and said that he regarded his acceptance of the invitation both as an honour and a pleasure. "Nothing that you could have done could have given me greater satisfaction. I shall myself look forward to your conversation, and I

trust that you will find me, however unlearned, yet not lacking in intellectual sympathy. You must regard it as in every sense your own house, and I trust that you will express any wish that we cannot unassisted interpret."

Mr. Worsley, having delivered his little speech, lay back upon his pillows with an air almost of elation.

When they assembled for luncheon, Walter was surprised to notice what a remarkably pretty girl Clare had become. He had never paid much heed to her, and had regarded her as a rather tiresomely outspoken child, whose principal function had been to interrupt if possible his conferences with Helen. But Clare with her light curling hair and blue eyes, full of life and vivacity, behind a kind of provoking shyness, was a new and startling phenomenon. Helen, Walter thought, was a little tired and quiet. But another point that struck him—he was almost ashamed to notice it—was how different an atmosphere it all seemed from the old rather bourgeois entertainments at Mr. Worsley's house, when you had been overpressed to eat and drink, entreated to express preferences with a sense of being exposed to a sort of hospitable battery, and causing disappointment by any refusal. Now there was a respectable butler who murmured inquiringly at your ear; the food was varied and plentiful, and served with much daintiness and precision. There had always in old days been a certain sort of condescension on the part of guests, and deprecation on the part of hosts; but now the meal was, so to speak, a country-house luncheon, and not a professional banquet. Miss Haden betrayed once or twice a tendency to turn the talk into improving channels, but it was Clare who to Walter's surprise seemed to be the Ariel of the company, prettily plaintive at one moment, and at the next making a frolic descant. She said of Mr. Goring that his sermons frightened

her; even if he preached about one of the apostles, he had the air of having just heard something to the apostle's disadvantage; "and as for the Litany," said Clare, "he turns it out as if he was chopping turnips." Miss Haden protested, and said that she liked to hear the prayers read dispassionately without personal emphasis. "But that's just what he does," said Clare; "he reads as if the prayers belonged to him, and you were not to have more than he allowed you."

After lunch Helen said something about a walk, but Clare in an injured tone said, "Oh, Helen, Mr. Garnet doesn't belong entirely to you; I know you won't let me walk with you, but I want to go and look at Mr. Garnet's rooms with him; after all, it was I who arranged the flowers there this morning."

Walter said that of course he would do both. Clare should come to the gate-house, and he would return in half an hour for Helen. Clare led the way chattering delightfully. Was he going to shut himself up all day doing his lessons? Would he not walk with her one day and give Helen a holiday? Had he a great many boys to teach at College? was he very severe with them?—she did not think he could be very severe.

When they arrived at the rooms, she insisted on showing him everything in detail—the cupboards, the pictures, the pens in the pen-tray, not forgetting the flowers. Might she look in sometimes in the mornings? Was there anything that he wanted?

The rooms were certainly very nice. The panelling and old plaster work had been restored, the carpets and curtains were warm in colour, the furniture old and solid—much of it indeed from his father's study. Clare was suddenly filled with horror, at the thought that it was his house, and most of it had been his furniture, and yet she

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had been showing him everything. When they went back she said, "I want to tell you that I mean to enjoy your being here more than all of them. They are so solemn about it, you can't think. You'll take me in, won't you?"

Walter assured her that she should be taken in—"And you will have some nice secrets with me, as you do with Helen?"

"Yes, if you will invent them." She put her arm in his when he said this, and Walter reflected that this delightful child was going to be an additional amusement. He had been a little afraid of solemnity and seriousness, especially with Mr. Worsley. But how pretty Clare was with all her little gestures and glances! She saw Helen and himself off from the door with a touch of jealousy; and when he turned for a moment he saw her standing there looking after them, as she touched her breast with her forefinger as though to say, "Me too!"

"You mustn't let Clare take possession," said Helen as they went off. "She likes to have her share."

"What a pretty creature she has become," said Walter.

"Yes, indeed!" said Helen, "and she makes everyone adore her. My father thinks she ought to be kept more in order; but who is to do it? Miss Haden is the only one that wants to and she can't; but I don't believe in suppressing people, and it is lucky, because I could not if I tried."

They walked to the top of the hill and turned into the wild woodland tract that covered the nearer upland. It was very still that day, and Walter thought he had never seen anything more lovely than the dreaming woods. They crossed a heathery space by a sandy track, and struck in under the copses; the eye could not penetrate far into the darkness of the undergrowth, and the wood seemed to be

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guarding some secret of its own, holding its breath till they had passed by. Sometimes a jay flew up, screaming indignantly, or a pigeon hidden in the forest depth rippled out its contented notes. Sometimes a rabbit scuffled and rustled in the brake; and they came every now and then to open spaces, where a stream soaked silently out among meadow-sweet and flowering rush. Little by little an extraordinary peace sank into Walter's mind. They said little, but smiled at each other as they walked.

"What a comfort it is," Walter said once, "just to walk like this, taking in impressions as they come—not having to express anything."

"Yes," said Helen, "it seems as if there simply couldn't be any wrong or trouble in the world."

"And yet everything here is quietly fighting for a place," said Walter; "trying to get uppermost, keeping the sun away from the rest, taking all they can get. No weak thing has a chance here! If trees and flowers could talk, what a horrid babel of complaints and threats and entreaties there would be: 'Give me a little room—don't take more than your share of the rain—oh, do keep away.'"

"Don't spoil it all," said Helen, laughing, "by turning it into a kind of Trades Union."

They sat down under a birch tree, on a cushion of moss; at the end of the little glade there was a touch of intensest blue, the blue haze of the distant plain.

"Is it only a fancy," said Walter, looking at Helen, who had clasped her hands round her knees as she sat, "or are you a little sad to-day? Is there anything wrong, dear? I seem to myself to have got so absorbed in my new work that I am getting a little hardened; but it is only a coating, and I am no different inside."

"No, I'm not sad, Walter," she said; "I am very happy

to think of you here with me, and my father is better, and you like Clare. I haven't a care in the world, or oughtn't to have; but I'm a little tired with nursing—it isn't what one does, but what one has to give; and then, too, I had a curious talk with my father the day he was ill. Walter, what funny little plans people make in the back of their mind, little games that they play by themselves till they all become quite unreal! My father showed me his mind, and it seemed to me to contain all the things I don't care about and none of the things I do. Perhaps it is only the difference between men and women. He seemed to have reasons for all he desired—no wonder about anything, no open spaces—it was like a little orderly garden. While with me the more that I know, the less reason there seems for being happy—the happiness comes from what we don't know.”

“I like to hear you talk like that,” said Walter; “but I think I am made more like him. I do want to know very much, and all the best things that have come to me have come from not being shut up in my own stubborn ignorance. Knowing you, knowing Harry Norton, have shown me beautiful things; but my tendency is to shrink back from and think the worst of what I don't know. My father's mind, for instance. I don't know what was in it, and I should be afraid to find out. The thing behind the world, whatever it is, seems to have hard knocks in store, plenty of stones for bread, plenty of serpents for fish. I don't trust the unknown at all; it seems to have no conscience and very little sympathy.”

“Perhaps it isn't thinking very much of us, Walter? Perhaps it gives us what we need, and means us to make the puzzle out. It wouldn't be worth much if we were simply told it.”

“I think it is finer to feel that,” said Walter, “but I can't.

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I must content myself with doing as well as I can the little I have to do and can do."

"Yes, we must do that," said Helen; "but I always feel that there is something very big indeed behind it all, if only we could see it."

They were silent a long time after that, listening to the soft murmur of the wind in the wood and drinking in the fresh scent of the woodland.

"Helen," said Walter suddenly, "you always make me feel happier. How do you do it?"

"I want you to be happy, Walter dear; I want it as much as I want anything."

He took her unresisting hand in his own and put it to his lips. She thought for a minute he was going to say something, but he said no more.

BOOK III

I

TWO years later, Walter arrived at Thurston at the beginning of July to spend a part at least of the Long Vacation there. He found his mother looking well—younger, he almost thought, than in the old days at the Manor. Mrs. Garnet, though she would not have considered it proper to own it, was a far happier woman than she had ever been. She was designed and formed for the life of a small town. She had the prestige of her former position, and this, added to the fact that she was the most accessible and kindest of women, had brought her what she always needed, a great company of friends, principally women, who deferred to her, adored her, petted her, asked her advice, and did everything, in fact, but take it. The house seemed to Walter always full of people “popping” in and out. Very little had changed at Thurston. Mr. Worsley’s business had grown, and it was now definitely admitted that he belonged to the County rather than to the town, or at all events to the fringe of the County. He had grown more portly, and his manner was easier and more assured. Clare had grown into a frisky and rather exuberant young woman, and Miss Haden remained as confidante rather than instructor, to confer solidity on Mr. Worsley’s household.

Walter himself was little altered: his features had perhaps a little lost the first bloom of youth, and his manner had become gentler and a little more ironical. He brought

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Norton with him, who seemed more lean, dusty, and loose-limbed than ever. Norton was touched, perhaps, with a shade of dreariness; he had lost his first enthusiasm for the company of intelligent youth, and he sometimes confessed that there was a sameness in the course of metaphysical symptoms through which a clever young man seemed destined to pass. He was a little tired of answering unanswerable questions and propounding tentative solutions. Norton had always had literary ambitions, but conversation and the ever-open door had made havoc of his leisure. Now, like Mr. Snodgrass, he felt, and indeed announced, that he was going to begin. But the precise and inevitable subject never emerged, and he continued to practise the rôle of a peripatetic philosopher.

Walter had had a busy two years. He had found Oxford life far more congenial than he had expected, and he had discovered that it was possible to mix very freely with undergraduates without forfeiting his dignity as an instructor. The fact that he was neither oppressively serious nor inconveniently sentimental stood him in good stead; while his acquaintance with sport, horses, and country life gained him the respect of the kind of undergraduate who tends to feel that the Don, whatever he is, is not a man of the world. Walter realized that the young men thought him far more a man of the world than he was, but he never attempted to exercise any direct influence, or to intellectualize the undergraduates, though the fact that he occasionally talked about books and public affairs, as if he took it for granted that they played some sort of part in the lives of all rational people, had more effect than he suspected. He had corresponded a good deal with Helen, and had been much in her company in his vacations, when he was not travelling; for he had found that his earnings and the money

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which was at his disposal when his mother's simple establishment had been liberally financed, enabled him to gratify a taste for European wanderings. He had grown more and more at his ease with Helen. He told her everything, consulted her about any troublesome matter, and was greatly attached to her in a dispassionate way. It was freely rumoured that some sort of engagement existed between them. But Walter was not a man who craved for the domestic and matrimonial atmosphere; he made few friends among the women at Oxford, and generally with those of frank and open friendliness, and he was the more at ease with them the more that their point-of-view resembled his own.

The only figure at Thurston whom Walter recognized as having undoubtedly become more of a personality was Dr. Bowlby. He had made friends with the Worsleys, and eventually Mr. Worsley, whose health was not so good as it had been, had become his regular patient, so that he was often at the Manor. Dr. Bowlby's practice was rapidly increasing. He was as bluff and uncompromising as ever in his manner; but his patients became aware that his diagnosis had nothing that was formal about it, that he showed great personal anxiety in serious cases, and frankly brightened up if improvement was taking place. He gained great credit, too, by frankly recognizing the professional claims of his patients. "Dr. Bowlby said to me," said a leading tradesman, descanting on the merits of his physician, "'Mr. Gregson, I know you are a busy man, must do your office work at certain hours, and be on your feet a good deal of the day. I'm not going to tell you to lie up, as I should if you were an unoccupied man, because I know you can't afford to do so, but we must try to work a treatment in.'" This was regarded as a dictum of inspired good sense. At

the same time he would say to a patient, "You must go to bed and stay there till I say the word"; and if in such a case his directions were disobeyed, he did not hesitate to say that he could not continue to attend his patient, and that another doctor must be requisitioned. Walter was pleased to see that Dr. Bowlby was undoubtedly becoming a power in the place; and pleased, too, to find that the Doctor was able to live in a house of his own, and to get a massive loud-voiced sister, of incredible awkwardness, to keep house for him.

Walter contrived to see a good deal of him, to hold transcendental arguments, and to discuss the innermost essence of things. But Dr. Bowlby was beginning to modify by experience his views of the humdrum current of life. "Depend upon it, that force, whatever it is, which makes people all think alike on conventional lines, is a very big thing. The feeling which makes men and women act, without thinking why they act, as a matter of course, is an immense power."

"But isn't it a mere inertia?" said Walter.

"My dear Garnet, it takes more forces to keep a thing still than to set it moving; there must be an absolute equipoise. Conventions are the equipoise of thought; they are the accumulated experience and passion of the world."

On another occasion, when Walter had been arguing very judiciously, Dr. Bowlby had burst out: "The fact is, you are too religious! I don't mean that you are a man of creeds and dogmas and ceremonies, but you have a fear of everything which is passionate, which is the fear that lies behind all religions. You are too well-balanced; and the danger is that, if any one of the balancing forces fail, you will have a great tumble."

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"Oh, it isn't that," said Walter, laughing. "It is only that I am unadventurous. I like a settled routine."

A day or two after Walter and Norton arrived, Norton said he was going to see the Worsleys.

"Perhaps I might come with you," said Walter.

"No, don't do that. I shall want to talk about you. Helen will want to know how you are doing."

Walter laughed. "Oh, she knows all about me," he said, "—much more than you do."

"She knows all that you know about yourself," said Norton, "but that is not very much. . . . I have often wondered what you *do* talk to her about," he went on. "You don't seem to me to have any life of your own. I don't mean that you don't do your work well; you are becoming the pivot of the College, in fact; but what happens when you are alone—when you wake in the night?"

"I practise a healthy objectivity," said Walter.

"Don't you ever do anything but look out of the window?" said Norton. "You don't seem to have any dreams or visions."

"My dear Harry, you are very inconsistent. You were always wanting me to come out of myself, and now that I have done so, you want me to go back again! But I have found my level and there I shall stay."

"And what is to become of the fair Helen? She is permanently engaged as Egeria, I suppose. Is she to have no life of her own either?"

"Helen is quite capable of looking after herself," said Walter. "She is endlessly good to me, but what I like

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about her is her tranquil common sense. She has no flights of passion—she is never excited or depressed.”

“I’m not so sure,” said Norton.

Norton and Helen were walking along the great grassy upland which led to Halham Hill. He was telling her about Walter. “It is wonderful,” he said, “the way he has caught on at St. Faith’s. He does his teaching very well; but besides that, he knows most of the men in the College. He is quiet, civil, almost respectful. He doesn’t make fun of them or try to captivate them. In fact, I don’t think he is particularly interested in them; but they run after him, imitate his way of doing things, think a tremendous lot of his opinion. He is supposed to know. He is always good company, and has a great deal of quiet humour; but he never seems to forget anything about them, or to call them by the wrong names; and then he behaves in exactly the same way to them all, whether he is talking to a blue, or a shy freshman. It is all rather surprising to me, when I remember what he was like two years ago, thinking everyone wearisomely conventional, and never wanting to set foot in Oxford again.”

“He was ill then,” said Helen; “but I am delighted to hear all this. I thought from his letters—he writes to me, you know—that he was enjoying his life.”

“But I don’t think he is,” said Norton. “He is content, but he isn’t what I call happy. He never seems to me to kick up his heels. It is his effect on the men that I wonder at. Most people like power, but Walter doesn’t seem to care about it. He has a great power—everyone recognizes it. I was talking to one of our old Dons the other day, a testy old boy, the Dean. There seemed likely to be a

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mild sort of row in the College about a man who had been sent down. Old Cracroft said to me in his squeaky voice, 'It's no good nowadays trying to punish the young men. All idea of discipline seems to have been given up. Parents let their children do just as they please; but I wish you would say a word to Garnet—see if he can do anything. He seems to wind these men round his fingers. I really can't bring myself as Dean to implore the aid of a Junior Lecturer; it would put me in a ridiculous position. But you might give Garnet a hint.' "

"What happened?" said Helen, looking at Norton with sparkling eyes.

"Oh, I spoke to Walter; he said he would see Bendyshe about it—that's the Captain of the Boat. And there wasn't any row."

"What did he say?" said Helen.

"Well, I had the curiosity to ask him. He said, 'Oh, I told them not to make fools of themselves.' So then I asked Bendyshe. He couldn't remember at first. Then he said, 'Oh, yes, it was something like this: "I hear that some of you chaps want to kick up a row. It won't do any good. You won't get Hollins back; and it's a pity, now that the College is such a decent place, to give it a name for being rowdy. It always gets round to the schools, that sort of thing; and the best schools will simply fight shy of us. Of course you can spoil the whole show if you like."' "What did you think?' I said to Bendyshe. 'Oh, I thought it was all right,' he said, 'I hadn't looked at it like that!'" "

"What did you think about it all?" said Helen.

"Oh, I felt it was rather a stroke of genius. Walter didn't make a row about it, or sentimentalize, or appeal to any high motives, or entreat the men to be sensible as a *personal* matter. Those are the mistakes we most of us

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make. He only threw exactly the right amount of cold water, in his pleasant way."

"Does he know he has this influence?" said Helen.

"He may—who can tell?—but he doesn't seem to care. I'm not sure that isn't half the charm."

"He never mentioned it to me," said Helen. "He tells me a little about particular pupils, and a little about the Dons."

"Come," said Norton. "What about us? Does he make fun of us?"

"No, not at all; he tells me some funny stories. He says that the mistake the Dons make is to bring too heavy artillery into action."

"How like him!" said Norton. "I confess I get annoyed with him sometimes for being so imperturbable. I told him two or three days ago that he hadn't any life of his own, but always seemed to be looking out of the window."

"What did he say to that?"

"Oh, he said I was very unfair—that two years ago I was always telling him to get clear of himself, and now I was begging him to come back."

"He is mysterious," said Helen. "Sometimes he is quite delightful—his letters are always amusing; but he talks sometimes as if I were the only friend he had in the world, and the next day as if he were bored by having so many."

"I think the mischief is that he is content to settle down. If he had succeeded to this place, he would have settled down here; now that he can't do that, he has settled down at Oxford. He hates trouble. I am not sure that it isn't your duty to push him over the edge."

"Perhaps I should go over the edge myself if I were to try," said Helen.

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"I'm going to say something very impertinent," said Norton, "but I wish I knew exactly how much you cared about him?"

"That's rather a startling question," said Helen, regarding him with a steady look.

"Perhaps I ought not to ask," said Norton, "and I shouldn't ask, if I was not on the whole more interested in Walter than I am in anyone else. He has got a great charm, quite irresistible. But then, as you say, he is a mystery. I feel that he wants setting free somehow. He seems to me like the prince in the *Arabian Nights*, who by some enchantment was turned into black marble from his waist downwards. Walter is turned into white marble instead. I had thought that a real experience, like being a Don, would restore him to life, but he is just as marble as ever. He is a mystery, as you say, and I want to penetrate it."

"Well," said Helen, "as you have said that, I will say too that *I* am more interested in him than I am in anyone. But it is different for me, because though I had and have a good many friends, they aren't mostly of a very interesting type. But Walter walked into my life like a fairy prince—I didn't see the marble—and beckoned me away, and told me that he wanted a friend, and would I help him. Of course I was tremendously flattered and excited—I had to try with all my might not to show him how much—but now, as far as we are concerned, the situation hasn't altered an atom. He is just as nice; he hasn't dropped me, as I thought he might. But as to helping him, there seems nothing to help."

"I am not sure it isn't your duty to drop him," said Norton.

"But if I did, and if he didn't care," said Helen, "it would be awful. I'm not going to pretend he doesn't make the greatest possible difference to me. I enjoy his letters, I

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enjoy talking to him. He is the biggest part of my life. He seems to bring a new atmosphere with him. Perhaps I ought to have more proper pride; but I will tell you plainly that I am so much interested in him that I am willing to have him on his own terms."

"But you can't go on for ever like this?"

"I don't believe much in forecasting the future. If one cared for anybody, it would seem to me ridiculous to cut him or her out of one's life, because one thought it would be so wretched if they were to die. I believe in the present, and in going on from hand to mouth, whatever that means."

"Yes, I agree. But suppose this imaginary person were getting his fun too easily without paying for it, and were half asleep in a leisurely sort of dream, might it not be right to wake him up?"

"It might be judicious," said Helen, "but I can't do that sort of thing. I can't withhold things for people's good. It's very feeble, I know, but I believe in giving people as far as one can what they want."

"To go about packing bags for idle people?"

"You know I don't mean that!"

"No, I apologize; but I look upon Walter as being in a kind of drugged sleep. The more I jog him, the more he smiles."

"Well, when he wakes," said Helen, "I shall be quite ready to bring him a cup of tea."

"You are almost as impenetrable as Walter," said Norton. "I thought women had a stronger sense of duty than men. But I do understand your feeling, though I may seem donnish and stupid. So we must let Walter snore on!"

"Yes, I am afraid so," said Helen. "We must be content to be like the wind of the Western sea."

II

MR. WORSLEY had improved considerably in health under Dr. Bowlby's regime. Visitors of a quiet kind came often to the Manor, the entertainment of whom, it must be confessed, often weighed very heavily on Helen's mind. Clare could not be depended upon to do anything for them. Occasionally they interested her, and it astonished Helen to see what endless trouble Clare would then take to impress and mystify them and gain their admiration. At times they amused her, and then she was even more dangerous, because she drew them out, by not very adroit questions, and put them, as she said, through their paces; neither did she conceal her obvious satisfaction when they gave the expected answers, so that Helen was often on tenterhooks for fear that offence had been given or taken. The result was that Helen found the more humdrum visitors mostly on her hands; and at times she had perspectives of a long series of days, as much alike as telegraph posts, when she would take out guests for a morning walk and an afternoon drive, and work wearily through long meals, eaten with conscientious deliberation. Mr. Worsley went less often to his work, but brought away papers to the Manor, and he had taken, too, to riding slowly about the estate, and acting to a great extent as his own agent. The strange thing was that though he talked to his tenants with an uneasy civility, and lavished money freely on repairs and improvements, he was yet only tolerated

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by them; while in old days a visit from Mr. Garnet, once a year, ending by a promise from him to see into some point—a promise which was never fulfilled—had been regarded by the tenants with awe and reverence, as one might have welcomed an angel from heaven. This habit of reverence they could not throw off, and it had more than once deeply vexed Mr. Worsley to find that a sympathetic call from himself to look at some new and expensive improvement, had often ended in some such phrase as, “No, we don’t forget the old Squire—he was a grand gentleman; it seemed to do you good to see the way he would draw himself up and say nothing.” Mr. Worsley had tried the effect of drawing himself up and saying nothing, with the painful consciousness that he had only given the impression of being disagreeable and purse-proud, on which points he was continually sensitive; moreover, Helen, who sometimes accompanied him, and sometimes on walks turned in with Walter to speak to an old tenant, was struck by the deference that was paid to Walter and his lightest word, compared with the indifference with which Mr. Worsley and his most elaborate statements were received.

At intervals, however, Mr. Worsley had recurrences of his trouble, and though both he and Helen had grown more or less used to these threatenings, it was clear that Mr. Worsley could not now be considered a robust man, and Dr. Bowlby’s visits were of constant occurrence.

Helen had become very much attached to Dr. Bowlby; he appeared to her in the light of a big elder brother, whose rather bluff and direct manner concealed not only a very kindly and sympathetic spirit, but also a shrewd perception of human qualities and inconsistencies, which interested Helen extremely. They did not only talk about Mr. Worsley; they discussed all their acquaintances and neigh-

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bours, and Dr. Bowlby had got in the way of saving up some of his more interesting experiences for Helen's ear. He knew that she enjoyed them, and he also knew that he could depend on her not to give him away. Often, too, she talked about herself and her visitors, and even more often about Clare, whose propensity for catching and holding the attention of anyone with whom she came into contact caused Helen considerable anxiety. There were two or three young men from Thurston, who had been playfellows of Clare in childhood, and had now become more or less avowed lovers, who took advantage of any excuse for appearing at the Manor. Clare encouraged them, accepted their flatteries, and, in answer to Helen's very occasional remonstrances, only said lightly that she must do *something* to pass the time.

One day Dr. Bowlby had come down from a visit to Mr. Worsley, and was strolling, as he often did, about the garden with Helen. She had been confessing her relief at the withdrawal of an elderly Captain Worsley and his wife, distant cousins, who had been spending a week at the Manor, and who had seemed to Helen two of the most vacuously unoccupied people she had ever come across. The Captain at home did small bits of carving from a book of very Victorian patterns, which, when combined into chests or small tables, were given away, with many conditions attached, to neighbours or neighbouring institutions. The wife did nothing but accounts and needlework. In the evening she played patience, and her husband sat by her and advised her. These worthy people, deprived of their home-pursuits, had weltered and languished through the days of their visit with patiently dissembled boredom. Helen had expressed a wonder as to whether the tedium of their stay had not possibly been too high a price to pay for the

somewhat doubtful advantage that might accrue to Mr. Worsley's health, and had gone on to say that the idea of two elderly people whose entire existence was spent in helping each other to pass the time was a positive excrescence on civilization.

"We mustn't think too much about that," said Dr. Bowlby. "Nature cares very little about the way we employ ourselves or indeed about the well-being of our friends and neighbours. Nature is thinking about something very different most of the time."

"What is that?" said Helen.

"Oh, the future of the race," said Dr. Bowlby.

"But what is the good of it all," said Helen, "if it is to end in discontented, tired, bored, unoccupied people?"

"It isn't for us to say," said Dr. Bowlby. "We have to face facts. To interrogate Nature too closely about her intentions ends in pessimism. It is as useless as it is to ask a child why it enjoys some tiresome and persistent game."

"But you have some idea as to *why* it all happens so?"

"Not very much," said Dr. Bowlby. "Nature has a very big waste-paper basket, and no compunction in throwing away the creatures that have done their work. Half my life is spent in thwarting her—in trying to save people from the rubbish-heap."

"But what is their work, then?" said Helen, looking curiously at Dr. Bowlby. "Surely the impulse that we have to try to help other people comes from Nature too?"

"I rather doubt it," said Dr. Bowlby. "Look at the way that Nature crams all her best work into the young, adorns them with beauty, makes them interesting to themselves and each other, surrounds them with an irresistible charm that captivates us, we hardly know why. It seems

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all done to keep the race going. Nature seldom regards quality, it is quantity she has in mind. The poet, the artist, the philanthropist, the priest—even the humble physician—are thrown ruthlessly aside whenever they are in the way, or if they refuse to come into line.”

“What a nightmare thought!” said Helen. “All our fancies, hopes, imaginations, affections are nothing?”

“Oh, no, they are something, but only like the pretty plumage of the bird in mating-time. The nest once made, the little brood hatched out, what becomes of all the fancies and imaginations you speak of? How many people retain them in middle-age and age?”

“But all the ties we make and try to be faithful to,” said Helen, “are these only devices to increase the population of the world? If I believed that, I would——”

“You would do much as you are doing,” said Dr. Bowlby. “But you must not press it too far. I believe that there is another power at work; but that is not Nature, and is very often opposed to Nature. It is greatly hampered, it is often at a grave disadvantage; but it works on, and suffers very much, often in a very noble way. But we must not expect to know very much about this; it must be enough for us that the power is there, and visits us occasionally.”

“It does not give one much object for living,” said Helen almost bitterly. “Dr. Bowlby, let me ask you something. I am finding my life rather difficult just now; it seems to me a little pointless. Some of my girl-friends who have felt like me have rushed off into the world, and found real work of their own. And I myself am very full of these fancies and imaginations and wild hopes at times; but it seems to be my duty to stay here, and to listen to people, and do all sorts of trivial things to pass the time, which neither I nor my companions particularly enjoy. Can’t one con-

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centrate somehow? There seem to be a good many people who don't want me particularly, and yet would find it inconvenient to do without me. And sometimes, looking ahead, I see a long vista of the same sort of thing before me. I often envy you your hard-driven, unpleasant work, because at all events it is something real."

"But, Miss Helen," said Dr. Bowlby, with unusual earnestness, "you are doing exactly the same sort of thing that I am doing, and, if I may say so, in a far more beautiful and delicate way. There are many people who depend upon you; and I have constantly admired, if I may say this, the way you throw yourself into it all so naturally and eagerly, and with such apparent content."

"I don't recognize myself in your description," said Helen, laughing, "but I am grateful to you for encouraging me, for putting the picture in a frame. It is ridiculous of me to complain. I must try to think of myself more as a ministering angel, a lady with a lamp."

"That would at all events be better than being metaphysical," said Dr. Bowlby. "I ought not to have talked as I did just now about Nature. I don't mean that what I said is untrue, but it is a barren path. And I, too, get into the same way of feeling dreary myself. I reflect that of my waking hours, about nine-tenths are spent in transit or talking twaddle of various kinds; but all that means something—it doesn't take long to see things with our eyes and minds, but it takes an immense time to work it into oneself. So we will neither of us despair."

Helen extended her hand to say good-bye. Dr. Bowlby held it for a moment in his own. "My dear Miss Helen," he said, "don't give way. I know as well as anyone can these sudden little dry strips of futility in one's life which have just got to be crossed. But don't forget that I am one

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of the many people whom you help without knowing it. Considering my performance, you won't think it a great compliment; but I do often and often try to meet things and people as I know you meet them. There, that is a little drop of wholesome and comforting medicine for you."

It astonished Helen to find how much this little talk helped her. It was a great comfort to know that someone else, and particularly one like Dr. Bowlby, whose good spirits and resourcefulness seemed unfailing, should have the same disgust at times for the wastefulness and futility of life. She was strangely encouraged, too, by finding that her difficulty was interesting to another. She was not egotistical, and did not require admiration. But the people she knew best—her father, Clare, Walter, Mrs. Garnet—seemed never to be aware that she could have any whims or desires of her own. She gave them with both hands the attention and sympathy they required of her; and indeed she was half ashamed of the impatience with which she had more than once of late regarded her own established function as being a well of sympathy to which her friends brought their little pitchers. Some life of her very own, some complete absorption, some joyful happiness which would evoke all her powers—this was what had hovered before her like a dream with the wind in its wings.

III

DR. BOWLBY had just been paying one of his usual weekly visits to Mr. Worsley, and had found him remarkably well. "Yes," Mr. Worsley said, "I have been conscious of late of a decided improvement in my health, and I should like to take this opportunity, Dr. Bowlby, of thanking you very gratefully for the patience and sympathy with which you have watched my case. I attribute my improvement largely to your advice; and I will venture to say that, conscientious as I have found such members of the medical profession as I have had occasion to consult, I have experienced from you a personal kindness and goodwill which I hope may entitle me to regard you more as a friend than as a medical adviser. May I add one further word? I am not wholly satisfied about my daughter Helen's health. It is not that her physical condition is amiss, but she seems at times languid and dispirited. Might I ask you, without of course telling her of my request, to observe her professionally and to reassure me on the point?"

Dr. Bowlby bowed and smiled, and said, "Mr. Worsley, the best reward that a doctor can have is that his patient should get well—the next that he should express personal regard as you have so generously done." He hesitated a moment, and then said, "Mr. Worsley, may I take advantage of what you have said about Miss Helen, as well as of your own improved health, to say something which has for some time been on my mind?"

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"Of course," said Mr. Worsley, "any advice or assistance that I can give you are entirely at your service."

"I won't beat about the bush," said Dr. Bowlby. "My visits to you have brought me in somewhat close touch with others of your family, and I have seen much of Miss Helen in these last months. I need not tell you that it would be impossible to know Miss Helen without regarding her both with admiration and affection. I do not in the least know what your wishes are, or what her feelings may be, but I cannot put together conventional phrases—the point is whether you would approve of my trying to win her for my wife?"

Mr. Worsley looked at him in silence, and grew pale to the lips, and dark about the eyes.

"I see," said Dr. Bowlby, "that what I have said causes you some agitation. Perhaps you would rather consider it, and speak to me at some later date?"

Mr. Worsley conquered his agitation by a great effort. "No," he said; "I would rather make an end of the matter now—indeed, I would rather not have it revived. I cannot go into the question—I can only say that I have other views, quite other views, in my mind. I ought to have anticipated this. I blame myself for not having done so—I have no wish to give you pain, and what you have said will cause no change, I hope, in our personal relations. But what you have asked is, I fear, out of the question—decisively so!"

Dr. Bowlby looked at Mr. Worsley in silence, with his accustomed friendly and frank expression.

"I quite recognize," he said, "that you have a certain right in the matter, and I would like to say that I have never said a word on the subject to Miss Helen, nor have I taken advantage in any way of my many and confidential

meetings with her. But I must be allowed to ask you one or two questions, which I hope you will not refuse to answer."

"I am not sure that I shall think it judicious to answer," said Mr. Worsley, with a slight return to his professional manner. "I am glad of your assurance; but I assume that as you have not spoken to my daughter—which I should have greatly resented—you consider it necessary to obtain my approval first, an approval which I regret to say I cannot give. The question therefore, I conceive, falls to the ground."

"Not quite," said Dr. Bowlby. "A man of some experience like myself does not fall in love lightly, nor act hastily. But I can hardly be expected to see the best hope I have in the world swept away, without asking whether there are any considerations which would induce you to think differently. Let me ask first whether there is anything in my character or conduct which would make you think that I should not be a good husband?"

"I could not," said Mr. Worsley, whose manner, as his self-assurance returned, became colder and more distant, "entertain any general objections to your engaging in matrimony, and still less could I base any objections on the score of character. I believe you, if I may say so, to be a thoroughly honest and trustworthy man, eminently sympathetic and kind-hearted."

"It is good of you to admit as much as that," said Dr. Bowlby, "because it makes my task easier. Are there any objections to my lack of fortune or my social standing? I can imagine—though I should not myself make much account of these objections—that you may feel doubtful here. But I would say that my practice has so much improved of late that I am fully justified in seeking a wife;

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and otherwise, my father was a clergyman, and I am myself a public school and university man."

"You press me hard," said Mr. Worsley, "but I do not base my objection on these facts. I will be candid with you. I see, or seem to see, a rapidly growing friendship between my daughter and Walter Garnet. To say that one has social ambitions for a daughter would lay one open to a charge of self-seeking; but I will confess that, apart from the affection I have for Walter, I should regard it as a great honour to be connected by marriage with so ancient a family. I could not consent to any influence being brought to bear on my daughter which would jeopardize the possibility of an alliance which I should regard with the deepest satisfaction."

"I will be as candid with you as you have been with me," said Dr. Bowlby. "I quite understand your feelings. But I know Walter Garnet well. I fully thought, more than a year ago, that what you indicate was a possibility. But I very much doubt if Walter has any thought of marriage at all. He is not a man in whose life, to speak freely, the sexual impulse plays a strong part. He is more apt to diffuse his emotional nature in friendship than to concentrate it in love. He is greatly interested in his work, and I think further that he is a man with a very strong love of independence. The cares and anxieties of matrimony would deter him. On the other hand, I will try to speak dispassionately, and I feel that Miss Helen is in considerable need of a sphere of her own. She is endlessly kind and good, but such unselfish ministrations do not and cannot really satisfy a woman's instincts. But I will say no more, though I cannot promise to dismiss the hope from my mind. It would be difficult to break off all relations with her, and might cause her a painful surprise; but if you wish me, as

you well may, to discontinue my visits, I shall of course fully understand."

"No," said Mr. Worsley, "I do *not* wish this, and I trust you will continue to come here as before. I will not even exact any conditions. I trust you implicitly. It would be most painful and embarrassing if you were to break off relations with us, and I am sure I can depend on you not in any way to complicate your present friendly intercourse with my daughter. I consider you to be a very desirable friend for her."

"Well," said Dr. Bowlby, "I will do my best; but these things are largely a matter of instinct rather than of reason, and I warn you that emotional disturbances have channels of their own quite apart from talk and even looks. However, if I see any reason to think that things are altering, I will tell you. You may think I am taking the matter calmly enough, but a doctor has to exercise a good deal of self-control, and I can promise that you shall have no reason to complain of me. I would like to add that I think you have behaved kindly and candidly, and I shall endeavour to do the same."

He extended his hand, and Mr. Worsley grasped it cordially. "Dr. Bowlby," he said, "I have now one more reason to be grateful to you. I cannot, as a father, be wholly surprised by your feelings, and I may of course be wrong in the principles of action which I have arrived at; but I appear to myself to see the situation quite clearly, and I believe that I have my daughter's ultimate happiness in view rather than my own. I need not say that the whole matter will remain entirely confidential, so far as I am concerned. I have every wish for your happiness, and venture to hope that you will attain it on lines other than those which you have done me the honour to indicate."

IV

IT was a week after the talk between Mr. Worsley and Dr. Bowlby that the latter paid his usual visit to the Manor. The conversation of the previous week had been an unfortunate one for the doctor. He was a man who was naturally diffident of his power to please his fellow-creatures, and perhaps he owed much of his likeability to the fact that he never took for granted that he would be liked, but made a constant effort to adapt himself in a quiet way to his companions and to recollect their tastes and interests. Mr. Worsley's words about desiring him to befriend Helen had unsealed his tongue. He had long dreamed in secret, but he was not a man who could push his own interests and claims. He bitterly regretted that he had spoken, and Mr. Worsley's words about the impossibility of his hopes had set up a dull ache in his mind which for the time being had made life appear grim and savourless.

He had seen Mr. Worsley in the afternoon, but no allusion had been made to their previous talk. When he was about to go, Mr. Worsley had insisted that he should come in to tea. They found there Helen, and by her side Walter. He was staying at the Manor, Mrs. Garnet having gone to the seaside. The two had been for a walk together. Clare was there in rather frivolous spirits, and one of the dubious youths from Thurston, Henry Saxby by name, who had lately joined his father in business as a land-agent. Saxby had been at a local school and was a pretentious youth,

overdressed, and with an uneasy mixture of boldness and timidity. It was not a well-assorted party. Mr. Worsley greeted Saxby with a chilly civility, and engaged him in talk. Dr. Bowlby sat down next to Helen, and the conversation became more or less general. Clare, however, was in one of her provoking moods, and presently said to Walter with an air of innocent curiosity, "Oh, Walter, Mr. Saxby has been telling me that the reason why he didn't go to Oxford was because it was such a waste of time." "Oh," said Walter good-naturedly, "so he has found us out! But let us hope he will be merciful, and keep his discovery to himself." Then, turning to Mr. Worsley, he said, "We are much misunderstood, we Dons! The other day an old acquaintance of mine spent three days in Oxford. I did my best for him, had him to luncheon and dinner, walked with him in the afternoons, and sat up half the night doing the work which I had to defer during the day. What do you think my reward was? When he went away he said to me, 'Well, I must say you Dons have an uncommonly easy time of it. You never seem to have anything to do!'"

Saxby was affronted by these remarks, and said, "Why, Mr. Garnet, my father was at Oxford himself, and *he* ought to know; he says he never went to a lecture, and hunted three days a week."

"Well," said Walter, "that's something, at all events! At what other place of education would that be possible? And then think of the invaluable Oxford manner; no one would ever suppose that your father was a Cambridge man."

"Unlike myself," said Dr. Bowlby—who thought that Walter's remark was a little sharp-edged. "I am afraid we didn't go in for deportment at Cambridge."

"I believe it is true," said Mr. Worsley, "that both at

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Oxford and Cambridge much more attention is paid to the curriculum than was formerly the case?"

But Clare was not going to have the dust laid thus. "Did you say the Oxford *manner*, Walter," she said, "or Oxford *manners*?"

"My dear Clare," said Walter, "Oxford *manners*? It is the first time I have ever even heard them mentioned."

"Anyhow," said Saxby pertinaciously, "my father knows better than to shell out to the tune of three hundred a year for three years for that sort of thing."

"Yes," said Walter, "it is a good deal of money to throw away."

"It isn't the expense that my father minds," said Saxby; "it's the waste of time."

"Yes, but whose time?" said Walter.

"I like Henry's father for that," said Clare. "He knows that if Henry went to Oxford, he wouldn't be able to come up here; he doesn't think *that* a waste of time."

"It is very difficult to know when we are wasting time," said Dr. Bowlby, "in my profession at all events."

"You mean that you may be laying up treasure in heaven?" said Walter.

"I'm quite content as long as I am amused," said Henry Saxby. "I don't think much about heaven."

"Oh, but you must think of the time when you are only amusing other people, Henry," said Clare.

"What do you think about it all, Helen?" said Walter.

"Oh, I feel like Mrs. Pryor in *Shirley*, when she said, 'My dears, does it not strike you that your conversation for the last half-hour has been rather fanciful?' "

"Oh, Helen, how depressing!" said Clare. "I thought I was really learning how to talk for once, but I give you all fair warning. I am thinking very seriously what manner

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I am going to adopt when I go out into society, and I have got my eye upon everyone."

"Oh, say it is mine," said Walter.

"No, you are a little too—well, learned, and Henry is too much on his defence, though he is very hearty; and Dr. Bowlby doesn't care enough, and Helen is too anxious. I think I shall copy papa—that is the way to get attended to."

"That's very right and respectful," said Walter. "But, Clare, you won't be popular if you make everyone sit up in turn, as you have just done."

"Oh, people don't mind a little scratch or two," said Clare. "What they hate is not being talked about at all. Besides, I don't want to be popular. I just want to have my way."

The party broke up. Clare accompanied Henry Saxby to the gate, and seemed to be admonishing him. Dr. Bowlby went off with Mr. Worsley.

"You were very silent, Helen," said Walter. "Were we all very self-conscious? Clare is extraordinarily lively, certainly!"

"Yes," said Helen, "but that sort of talk makes me feel rather deadly, probably because I can't think of the right repartees till I go to bed; but I'm not sure that I want to sparkle like that. It seems to me to leave little stings in one's mind!"

"Oh, it's only a game," said Walter. "I think you take things rather seriously."

"Papa doesn't like it," said Helen. "He doesn't like Henry Saxby, and he thinks Clare encourages him, and he thinks I ought to interfere; and yet he is proud of her, in a way: it is all rather perplexing."

"Oh, Saxby is a harmless sort of 'oaf,'" said Walter. "I

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think Clare knows what she is about. I rather like her fancies. She keeps one alive, at all events. But I must go back to my work."

He strolled back to the gate-house; Helen stood in the window watching him. She saw him meet Clare on the path, who held out her hands as if to bar the way. Helen saw Walter catch her hands in his, and then draw her to him, and they went off together, and disappeared up the gate-house stairs. They did not reappear, and the maid came in to remove the tea. Helen talked to her for a little, and then catching up a cap in the hall, went down past the little Church, and took the road that led to the Vicarage. She knew that Mrs. Goring had returned from the seaside, leaving Mrs. Garnet in charge of Cousin Jane, and she had a sudden desire to see her.

She found Mrs. Goring and the Vicar together in the study. "William doesn't seem in the least grateful to me for returning," she said. "He says that he has quite settled down into a quiet routine, and that he has been very comfortable."

"I did not quite say that," said the Vicar, "but it would have been inconsistent with candour not to have admitted that I got on better than I expected! But I admit that Mary's presence somehow gladdens the house, though I can hardly say why."

"Don't let us look into these things too closely," said Mrs. Goring, giving her William a little kiss, which made him wink. "Helen, come along with me, and let him think over his privileges. I won't pretend I didn't miss *him*, even at the risk of increasing his spiritual pride."

When they were alone together, Mrs. Goring said, "Helen, dear, you know how I love Mrs. Garnet. But her conversation lasts all day and every day, and one can't

get a word in edgeways! However, it gave my unfortunate tongue a rest. But what have you been doing with yourself, dear? You don't look happy. You weren't even amused by William's candour."

"I don't know what is the matter," said Helen; "in fact, I came to ask you to tell me. Things seem to be going wrong."

"You haven't been quarrelling with Walter?"

"No, indeed—he is just as nice as ever; I begin to wish sometimes he was not always so nice. There aren't any ups or downs."

"I know exactly," said Mrs. Goring. "He is staying with you, isn't he?"

"Yes, and I had better have it out at once; he is rather taken up with Clare. She goes and sits in his room in the gate-house and talks to him."

"Well, I don't wonder," said Mrs. Goring. "Clare is very pretty and very lively. I expect she amuses him very much."

"Don't tell me I am jealous," said Helen, rather pathetically, "that always seems to me the most odious thing in the world; and it isn't as if Walter neglected me either. But I feel I don't amuse him."

"Helen, he cares about you in quite a different sort of way."

"Yes, I know," said Helen, "and I think that is what disturbs me. I'm going to speak out, whatever you may think of me. I feel rather like Walter's old blazer, which he says is the only coat of his that is comfortable, because he doesn't even know he has got it on. I don't think he knows now when he is with me."

Mrs. Goring looked at her inquiringly. "It's just the same with my old man," she said. "He is aware this evening

that he has got me on, like Walter's coat, because he has become used to being alone. But to-morrow I shan't pinch him anywhere. And yet, as I have said to you before, I think that if I died, he would die. Caring for people becomes a part of one; one doesn't think about it, but it is always there when it is wanted."

"Yes," said Helen, "but at first?—you wouldn't have been contented if Mr. Goring had cared for you so much that he did not think of you?"

"My dearest Helen," said Mrs. Goring, "don't tell me you have fallen in love with Walter!"

"I don't know," said Helen, reddening uneasily. "I don't know what I feel about him. I used to be very proud of being his friend, and I was only anxious to come up to his standard; but now I get angry with him."

"What about?" said Mrs. Goring.

"For being always exactly the same," said Helen. "He doesn't want me and yet he can't do without me. And now I am going to say something worse. Dr. Bowlby—I have seen a great deal of him in papa's illness—I have a feeling that *he* wants me, in a very different sort of way."

"Has he said so?"

"Not a word; we talk philosophy."

"That's very dangerous; when William was most in love with me we talked about Anglo-Catholicism. He explained to me about the Council of Trent."

"I like Dr. Bowlby very much," said Helen, "and I trust him."

"Don't you trust Walter?"

"Not like that. Walter's mind goes away from mine into places where I can't follow him. Dr. Bowlby's comes to meet mine, and holds a door open."

"What convenient things metaphors are, to be sure,"

said Mrs. Goring. "Conversation would be so indelicate without them."

Helen laughed aloud. "Yes, there are some things it is difficult to talk quite plainly about. But, dear Mary, I haven't done. I think all this is having a bad effect on me; I used to be friends with everyone, and hold hands all round. Now I don't seem to care whether people like me or not. I feel like saying, 'No, I am not going to pack your bag for you—I'm busy.' I want a life of my own. I don't want to go about fetching cushions for people, and filling vases with flowers to put in their rooms. I want to be cared about fiercely and horribly, and I want to care like that myself. I want to go through fire and water, and not mind. That sounds very melodramatic and affected; but I can't tell you the awful yearning that seizes on me, to be carried away off my feet anywhere, to be crushed, ill-used, beaten—anything to be really needed, like water gulped down by a thirsty man. But how disgraceful all this is! I see you are disgusted at me."

Mrs. Goring's only answer was to enfold Helen in a close embrace. "Dearest Helen," she said, "you probably won't believe your dull old Mary when she tells you that she knows every step of the way. It is just the tide of life rising in you; but I can't help you dear, directly. No one can. One must struggle on alone—just as when one dies, one has to feel oneself ebbing away from behind the eyes which see all that one loves best. It's the cruel mystery of life—the need of love . . . the strongest, fiercest, best thing in the world . . . the only thing! Yet one can't capture it. Just go straight on, dear girl, and be thankful that you have got to live and behave as if nothing were happening; it is the people who don't feel that they must behave decently who suffer most. Come and talk to me whenever you care

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to. Even now, you will feel more happy that you have told me all. These men! How little they see and understand what one goes through! It's amazing that one can care for them at all; and yet somehow one prefers their being stupid to their seeing through it all."

Helen kissed her. "Yes, you understand," she said. "How can I thank you enough? I feel ever so much happier, and shall go back quite cheerfully, and jump through my hoops. Good-bye, dearest Mary."

That evening, as they sat at dinner, Mr. Goring said, "What did Helen want you for to-day?"

"She has encountered, almost for the first time," said Mrs. Goring, "the stupidity of men, and came to me for comfort. Out of my abundant stores of experience I ministered to her. She is the dearest girl!"

There was a silence, and then Mr. Goring said, "I think you are a little hard on me, Mary."

"My treasure!" said Mrs. Goring.

V

THERE was to be a new wing of the hospital opened in Thurston, and it was decided that the Duke of Shropshire should be asked to officiate. Mr. Worsley, as Secretary, was requested to approach His Grace. A few days later the Committee met again to consider arrangements. Mr. Worsley announced that the Duke was coming, and Canon Peacock, who was in the chair, said with a touch of awed solemnity that there had better be a Mayoral luncheon previously. "I suppose," he went on, "that His Grace will probably motor over from Staughton and return the same day."

"No," said Mr. Worsley meekly, "I have asked him to stay the night with me, and he has accepted my invitation."

There was a momentary hush, and the members of the Committee looked at each other. Canon Peacock, after a pause, said in a somewhat tremulous voice, "We are, of course, much beholden to Mr. Worsley for securing the Duke—I should say for offering the Duke his hospitality—at the same time, this is hardly a private matter, and the Committee might wish to express an opinion on the subject."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Worsley, "it is entirely a private matter. The Duke is not, so to speak, on duty during the whole of his visit. He is to come to my house in the course of the morning. I shall bring him here to the luncheon. The ceremony will follow with a brief reception,

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and from what I know of the Duke, the less protracted that the official part is, the better he will be pleased."

There was another silence, and then the Canon, a little sullenly, suggested the consideration of the exact details.

When the meeting broke up, Mr. Worsley, finding that no one seemed inclined to discuss the matter with him, went off. The Canon detained the Mayor, Mr. Peckham, a wholesale chemist, and said, "I am afraid I must consider Mr. Worsley's intervention in this matter a little ill-judged. There may be many things the Duke might wish to see—the Church, the Sholto almshouse, the sewage pumping-station; it seems precipitate, a little precipitate?"

"No, Canon," said Mr. Peckham, "I am glad that Worsley has taken the bull by the horns. The Manor is the sort of place the Duke ought to stay at, and though it may look a little forward, His Grace's acceptance shows that he recognizes Worsley as belonging to the County."

"I expect he confuses him with Mr. Garnet," said the Canon.

"That may be," said Mr. Peckham, "but Mr. Worsley is the best man for the purpose."

"I am only afraid that His Grace will feel that his personal preferences have not been sufficiently consulted," said the Canon with resentful suavity.

The Duke arrived. Mr. Worsley was by this time somewhat alarmed at his temerity, but clung to Walter as a sheet-anchor and an interpreter in one. They met the Duke at the gate-house, where he descended from his car; he was a short sturdy man with red hair, carelessly dressed, and only remarkable for his extreme absence of embarrassment of any kind. He seemed indeed entirely unconscious of anyone's presence. Mr. Worsley made a low bow and

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shook hands; then he presented Helen, whom the Duke regarded with a good-natured smile. Walter came forward. "Hullo! I've met you before," said the Duke in loud tones. "Doesn't this place belong to you, by the way?" Walter explained the situation. "Yes, I remember your father," said the Duke. "By Jove, on a day like this, I envy him his gift of the gab—seemed no reason why he should ever stop; but when *I* stand up, by God, there seems every reason why I shouldn't begin." The Duke laughed, a loud harsh laugh, showing all his teeth.

The Duke seemed quite unacquainted with the arrangements. "Oh, luncheon first—well, that may get the steam up a bit; but to have the show over first would give me a better appetite. Look here, Worsley!"—Mr. Worsley's heart leapt within him at the use of his plain surname; he felt as though he had been sealed of the tribe of Judah by that one word.—"I hope there's to be no loitering about and chattering afterwards, I can't abide that—never know who half the women are. Yes, that's right—come back here and have a look round—pretty old place—do any farming on your own, Garnet?"

"All Mr. Worsley's farms are let," said Walter.

"Oh, I forgot; well, I daresay you are glad to be rid of the land. I know I should be!"

They drove down together in state, and the Duke was very attentive to Helen. He made her promise to come over to lunch at Staughton. "Mind, I shan't forget—I only forget the people I don't take to—that's a bargain then!"

They drew up in front of the Town Hall, with a large crowd looking on. The Duke shook hands with the Mayor and Canon Peacock, who were speechless with nervousness, and with anyone else within reach. "Here,

Garnet," said the Duke in an undertone, "just stick to me like a limpet, and for God's sake tell me if I seem like going wrong."

The luncheon was a lengthy affair, and the ceremony followed. They did not get away till nearly four o'clock. As soon as they were in the car, the Duke said, "I'm nearly dead, but they tell me there are fellows who quite like that sort of thing. If it hadn't been for that cigarette after lunch, I should simply have pegged out." They got up to the Manor for tea, and then Walter, instructed by Mr. Worsley, took the Duke round. He was full of shrewd and amazing comment. "Who *is* Worsley, by the way? —I can't remember. Nice girl that. Oh, you have kept the house, have you? Yes, property is all very well, but it's an awful tie—I feel tethered like a dog in a kennel. These Socialists seem to think one ought to clear out; but damn it, I don't get a week in a year when I can really do as I like."

The evening was a satisfactory one. The Duke's spirits rose when he heard that no guests were invited. "Now that's real hospitality!" he said. He talked pleasant nonsense to the girls at dinner, pleasant sense to Mr. Worsley and Walter afterwards; smoked a single cigar, and went off to bed early. "I'm more knocked up than if I had been stalking for twelve hours," he said.

"A very jolly time," he said to Mr. Worsley as he went off in the morning. "You must let me look in again, sir. Garnet, won't you come over and shoot some day—and Miss Helen must come—won't see you unless you bring Miss Helen!"

"Now that," said Mr. Worsley, in a reverential tone, as the car rolled away, "that is a man whom I can respect—no pretences, no chilliness, just a simple human being.

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Did you observe that he spoke of the Duchess as 'my missus'? That, I confess, touched me deeply."

"Yes, he is a good fellow," said Walter. "I really think he means what he says, and it must be a comfortable thing to feel that whether you say the wrong thing or the right thing, people are equally pleased."

"I wouldn't be a Duke for any money," said Helen. "Fancy having to go on like that always."

"I don't expect you will be asked to be a Duke, in any case, Helen," said Walter, "but you would make a remarkably fine Duchess, you know!"

VI

IN the weeks which followed, Helen became aware of being surrounded by a certain sense of mystery. She continued as a rule to go out with Walter in the afternoons; but a sparkle which had generally enlivened their talks was missing, and for this she blamed herself. There were fewer silences between them, and Walter seemed to manifest an anxiety that subjects should not fail them. He told her in detail much about his Oxford life, but he never recurred to the past, or took refuge in plans for the future. There seemed too to be, on his part, less desire to ask her opinion, less curiosity as to the current of her thoughts. But it was all very intangible, and she could hardly have put it into words. She attributed this partly to the familiarity of their relations, but even more to her own restless and dissatisfied condition. What however puzzled her was that there was in Walter's manner an almost deprecatory touch, as though he were anxious in some way to atone for some failure on his own part to fulfil an obligation.

At times this sense was so strongly with her that she felt almost impelled to say to him that she had prophesied, when they first made friends, that the resources of her mind would be soon exhausted, and that he had sounded the shallows in which he then refused to believe; but she felt that this might needlessly embitter the situation, which she really believed sprang from the fact that it was her own zest and interest in the simple current of life that had somehow failed.

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At the same time she became aware that a subtle change had passed over the relations between Walter and Clare. Clare was less provoking to him, talked less at him, was less inclined to challenge his opinion. Indeed, it was obvious that Clare was finding the direct contact with life far more stimulating than ever. Instead of aimless dawdling in search of amusement, Clare went about with a look of purpose and intentness, and made her plans with increased deliberation. She began to seek Mr. Worsley's society, and was more disposed to consult and meet his preferences and prejudices half-way. Meanwhile Helen felt that Clare had less and less to say to herself, and that their lives touched at very few points.

It was altogether an unhappy time for Helen. If it had not been for Mrs. Goring, she would have found herself extremely lonely.

There came a day when Helen had to spend the afternoon in returning a call at some distance. As a rule Miss Haden was her companion, and Miss Haden did not indulge much in conversation in a car, because it made her throat sore and impaired her enunciation. Helen was conscious in herself of a growing tendency to inactivity. A long walk tired her, and it was a luxury to glide along the country roads watching the landscape stream past, noting the look of the hamlets and farmsteads, the expressions and physiognomies of houses and passers-by, the little vignettes of the country-side, the farm-wagon with its long team, an old labourer riding postilion-wise on the leading horse, his mud-stained boots dangling down, and intimating his wishes to the horses behind him by infinitesimal hints and whisks of the whip, or the elderly farmer and his wife safely packed into the high dog-cart, and swaying slightly in unison as the road deflected. Helen did not know why she was so inert; but instead of

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being preoccupied, as was formerly the case, with vague dramatic imaginations, so that she hardly saw the scene through which she was passing, her mind seemed now to be always endeavouring to keep certain thoughts at arm's-length, while her eyes and brain took refuge in minute but uninterested observation.

On this occasion, Mr. Worsley suggested at luncheon that both the girls should go to call on the Fanshawes, ten miles away. But Clare vehemently protested, and did not desist, till her father reiterated his desire in measured tones. She said that she could not bear a long motor-ride, and that at the dull country-houses at which they called, she was relegated to the background, while her distinguished elder sister engrossed the conversation.

However she finally submitted, though pettishly; but Helen had noticed, or had thought she noticed, a look pass between Walter and Clare, after which the latter had abandoned her resistance.

When they started, Helen said to Clare, who was sitting with a rather distant air beside her, "How little we see of each other nowadays, Clare!"

"You are always so full up!" retorted Clare.

"Yes," said Helen with a sigh, "that is true! I seem to be slower than I used to be at getting through things; don't you know how sometimes one can't make up one's mind?"

"I should have thought that you always knew your own mind—at least you always have your own way."

"Don't let us waste time in arguing, Clare. It isn't that I have my own way. It seems to me that no one has their own way in our family—a certain order has grown up, to which we all submit. I suppose that is what generally happens."

"You manage to get your afternoons free to walk with Walter."

"That's all part of the order," said Helen. "Do you mean that he would like a change?"

"Well, perhaps he might. Walter is rather dependent on being amused." She was silent a moment and then added, "I don't like doing things round the corner, and you don't know that I see much more of Walter than I used to."

"But when do you see him? You are not often with him."

"Yes, I am," said Clare defiantly. "I look in upon him in the morning and evening when he is working. I interrupt his work. I even walk out with him, when everyone else has gone to bed. I suppose you think it's not playing the game. That's why I told you. I am not ashamed of it, and I have disliked thinking that you don't know. I am very fond of Walter."

"I don't object, Clare; why should I? I am very glad that he should have two people to talk to instead of one."

But as she said it, she knew that it was false. Had she lost Walter's confidence, she asked herself, or had she ceased to amuse him?

"It has had one good effect at all events," went on Clare. "It has made me feel what shoddy creatures all those Thurston boys are, whom I used to think so splendid. Walter shows them all up. Wasn't Harry awful the other day beside him? He made himself so offensive about Oxford, and bragged about his father's money. And Walter didn't mind a bit; he was quite polite, and brushed Harry aside quite good-temperedly. He helped him out, like helping a fly out of the honey and seeing it crawl away making a sticky mark on the cloth."

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"I'm afraid I simply hated that talk," said Helen; "it seemed like a lot of dogs, everyone walking about slowly on tiptoe and growling."

Clare nodded. "I rather enjoyed it," she said. "I suppose, by the way, you will talk to Walter about all this, or even tell papa?"

"Why on earth should I do either?" said Helen.

"I should in your place," said Clare. "I should try to put a spoke in somebody's wheel. Don't you want to keep Walter to yourself?"

"Not like that," said Helen. "Of course I don't pretend that I don't wish to keep him, but I don't regard him as my property."

"That seems to me very inhuman," said Clare. "I expected you to be angry—but I haven't been treacherous. I felt that you had had your innings, and I didn't see why I shouldn't have mine."

Helen found herself wholly incapable of replying for a moment. Then she said, "Clare dear, I don't know what to say. I want to keep Walter for my friend, but I don't want to tie him down. I don't want to tie anyone down; and the more I care for anyone, the less I want to do that. Do you mind my talking to Walter about it?"

"It depends on what you say. Of course you can make it unpleasant for me."

"I don't want there to be any secrecy about it," said Helen. "Why shouldn't Walter talk to you? The only thing I don't like is that you should see him round the corner, as if you thought you ought to conceal it from me!"

Clare surveyed her for a moment with a curious air, and then said half-apologetically, "You're a good sort, Helen! I really believe that you don't want to pouch people. But if you don't take care, it will end by your being an old maid;

you are always going shares in your friends. Walter is as faithful as you would expect from a gentleman—for that is what he is, and it is more than most of the men we know are. He isn't always wanting to show his ticket. I think his coming here and staying with us is perfectly supreme. When those horrible Dixons came the other day, and congratulated papa on his beautiful old house, Walter didn't correct them—and papa didn't either, which I thought disgusting."

"It would have been rather awkward for papa to explain it all before Walter, but I quite agree about Walter. Only look here, Clare; you and I mustn't have a struggle about Walter—that would be intolerable."

"Of course not; but, Helen, you don't understand Walter one bit! There's something like Henry VIII about him; he likes variety, and he is very particular about quality. He has the good taste to like both of us; he has a serious side, of course, and he likes you best then; but he likes me to play with—he can be very silly, dear boy."

"We won't quarrel about him, Clare."

"I'm not sure that I shan't," said Clare. "You seem to me to be behaving like the Judgment of Solomon, and want to cut the baby in half; but half a dead baby isn't any use—one wants the whole live one."

"That was the result of Solomon's judgment."

"I daresay. But I'll play fair, Helen. I won't poach on your preserves. You may have Walter serious, but I will provide the comic relief."

The car paused at the Fanshawes' lodge, and a moment later, the gate being opened, sped up through the park. The classical façade of a square country mansion was visible through the trees.

"Now I feel dreadfully shy," said Clare. "I do envy you that, Helen. You never seem shy!"

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"I shiver within. At this moment I feel that I can't walk across the Hall."

Old Lady Fanshawe received them with demure condescension in a long comfortable drawing-room full of chintz-covered arm-chairs. Miss Fanshawe, a pale rather doleful maiden of thirty-five, made gentle advances to Helen. The tedious ceremony was soon over, and the girls were once more gliding away. "How I hate the whole thing!" said Clare. "What a way to spend an afternoon! The atmosphere of the country-house sickens me, everything so comfortable and so dull. But, Helen, mustn't it be awful to be like Miss Fanshawe? She has developed two quite distinct lines from her nose to the ends of her mouth since I saw her last, and she used to be quite pretty! I would rather be married to Mr. Goring, than live like Miss F., fading away out of everything, more hopeless every day, no one wanting you; and yet one is expected to sit still, and wait till somebody comes along. I'm not sure it wasn't a mistake to leave Thurston. We shall fall between two stools."

They relapsed into silence. Helen would have given anything to be able to talk. She knew only too well what Clare meant; but thus handled, the remedy seemed worse than the disease. Yet everything seemed to be crumbling down about her.

The two girls came back to be met at the door by the butler, who said that Mr. Garnet had asked to be informed the moment Miss Helen came back. "He has had a letter, Miss, which he opened, and then said he wished to know as soon as you returned." Clare listened impassively. "I will go to him at once," said Helen. "I suppose he is in the gate-house?"

She hurried across the court and up the turret-stair,

and found Walter sitting in a chair, smoking, but with neither book nor paper in his hands. He rose on her entrance. "This *is* good of you, Helen," he said. "I want you to look at this letter from Cousin Jane, and tell me what I ought to do."

Cousin Jane wrote to say that Mrs. Garnet, after having been unwell for a few days with something like influenza, had had a heart-attack, which the doctor said was the result of exhaustion, and which had yielded to remedies, but that she was very weak. She had refused decisively to allow Walter to be sent for, and had repeated this several times. "The doctor," said Cousin Jane dryly, "does not seem to consider her in any danger." She finished reading it, and gave it back to him; their eyes met, and Helen discerned in his look a deeper sort of trouble than she had ever seen in him before.

"I don't think you need hurry off to-night," she said. "That might only alarm her; but if I were you, I would go to-morrow, for your own sake. There's nothing like seeing people to reassure one. Shall I take this round to Mrs. Goring?"

"I will go and see her myself," said Walter. "Will you come with me? I can't settle down to anything. I will certainly go to-morrow."

They went off at once. "I don't think you need be really anxious, Walter," said Helen. "Miss Jane always takes the gloomiest view of everything, and you would have been summoned if there had been real anxiety."

"Yes, I know," said Walter; "but I can't bear the idea of my mother being ill. She has never been ill in her life. She hadn't time to be, or inclination either; and then, Helen, I don't think I have done all for her that I could have done. It is very strange that though I love her better than anything

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in the world, her talk has the effect of making me very impatient; she talked very little in old days."

"You mustn't let yourself feel like that," said Helen; "it is really morbid. I have constantly been with her and you, and you never show the smallest sign of impatience. Indeed, I have often wondered at it. I think you have made her very happy."

"Thank you, Helen dear," said Walter. "Yes, I think it is morbid. But somehow the idea of her being in any danger makes one think how horribly short the time is which one can spend with the people one loves best. When everything goes well, one feels it to be endless, and one thinks that if one isn't as kind as one might be, one can easily make it up. A thing like this seems like drawing a line in an addition sum; the time for adding it all up has come, and one can't alter the figures."

Helen put her hand through Walter's arm and said, "Yes, you might think that, if she had ever blamed you, or even have been disappointed by you. But you have been everything to her."

"She never blames anyone," said Walter; "it is that which makes her so dear. Of how many people can one say that—perfect love!"

His voice broke; and there came into Helen's mind the thought that this had been the one thing hitherto missing in him, the knowledge that he could love anyone like that. She had wondered sometimes whether his kindness and patience with Mrs. Garnet had not been only the perfection of fastidious courtesy, but this touch of passion was new and dear to her. . . .

They were soon at the Vicarage. Mrs. Goring was decisive and reassuring. "No," she said, "you mustn't *dream* of hurrying off. That would really alarm your

mother; and if she had felt ill, she would certainly have sent for you. Go to-morrow; and I will come with you, if you will let me. It will do my dear William good—he will feel he need not go; and besides he is very bad with convalescents. Perhaps we shall be able to bring her back; no one ought to be ill in seaside lodgings.”

It was all arranged, and Helen returned with Walter, who talked much of his mother, and with greater freedom about his father, than he had ever done before—how exacting the Squire had been, and yet with such an appearance of considerateness and reasonableness that no resistance seemed possible.

Clare at once sought out Helen, and asked what had happened. “How provoking!” said Clare, “just when we were so comfortable. I am sure there is very little the matter with Mrs. Garnet—she is never ill; but Walter will be depressed and anxious, and I am no good with people who are in trouble; trouble seems such a waste of time, such a hateful interruption.”

“We can’t escape it, Clare!”

“That makes it all the worse.”

Walter explained matters to Mr. Worsley; and throughout the evening, a casual visitor might have supposed that he and his daughters were under some pressure of anxiety, and that Walter was the untroubled one of the party. Clare was the most subdued of the four, and went off early to bed. Walter lay long awake, and passed with ever-growing self-contempt through the haunted corridors of memory. How often his mother had tried to satisfy the boyish claims which his father would not recognize! He could recall the troubled and shrinking look with which she had regarded him, when he had persisted in pressing some little grievance upon her. She had never hinted that his selfish wishes distressed her;

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she had only desired that her husband and son should be happy, and looked for no thanks, only for some little show of love.

Mrs. Goring proved an excellent fellow-traveller. She made no professions of sympathy, she did not encourage Walter to talk; she sat in a corner of the carriage, doing her accounts, and once or twice asked Walter for his help. They arrived at the house in the afternoon, a neat little stone-built villa, in a trim garden. Cousin Jane gave them a grim welcome. They had taken the precaution of wiring from a station *en route*, so that they could not be remanded. "How am I to explain it all?" she said. "Emily is quite comfortable, only very weak, and your arrival will give her a shock. Well, it is no fault of mine!"

"What nonsense!" said Mrs. Goring. "Go and tell her that Walter and I have arrived; we think she will be more comfortable at home, and we hope to take her back when she is fit to travel."

Jane went off, and a moment later they were summoned upstairs. It was a pleasant airy room, with a bow-window looking out to the sea. Mrs. Garnet lay, her face turned to the door, with an expectant smile. Walter's first thought was how small she seemed to be, and how old. Mrs. Goring marched into the room, and said, "Dearest Emily, you must not be vexed with us; I know you didn't wish us to come, but Walter was so anxious to be with you, and I abetted him. We shall wait a day or two, and then take you back home; it's so dull being in bed away from home."

Mrs. Garnet did not speak, and to Walter, coming closer, it seemed that something had gone out of her face. She just turned her head up for his kiss, but she did not clasp him in her arms, as she was wont to do.

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"Walter darling, it is good of you to come—and you too, Mary," said a faint low voice, hardly recognizable. "There was really no need; I am quite well again, only very tired."

Mrs. Goring carried off Jane on pretence of making arrangements about rooms and food. Walter sat down beside his mother.

"I didn't want to disturb you, dear, at your work," she said, "and I know the Worsleys are so proud of having you. It was only a little turn I had; I felt suddenly faint. I shall be quite well again in a day or two."

She put her hand out; Walter clasped it in both his own and kissed it. "Ought you to talk, mother darling?"

"A little—I am so pleased—you wanted to come, my darling, to see your stupid old mother?"

The tears started to Walter's eyes. "Yes, mother," he said. "I have missed you very much!"

She lay silent, her eyes closed, for some time, smiling to herself.

"I had such a strange fancy, dear, just before I fell ill. I was thinking about dear papa . . . and I wondered when I came to meet him, whether he might be vexed with me for having been so happy at Thurston—whether he would think I had not remembered him. . . . Dear papa always liked to be first with me. I have been happy—such good friends—but I always wished him back."

"Of course, darling," said Walter. "*Of course*, he would have wished you to be happy. Don't you remember how if you were away for the afternoon, he would come out of his study to say, 'Well, Mamma, have you had a pleasant day?' He always wanted us both to be happy. That is how he would meet you."

She smiled again at that, and presently fell asleep. The

sky darkened outside, and Walter sat holding her hand, and seemed to look into the very depths of love.

Presently Jane came back, and a nurse arrived. Mrs. Garnet roused herself to say a word of thanks to the nurse. Mrs. Goring came in, and said, "Now, Emily, I must take Walter off to have some dinner—and you must just sleep. The more you sleep, the sooner you will be well. Is she obedient, nurse? She is very fond of her own way, you know."

Walter kissed her again, and said he would look in to say good-night.

Dinner was a solemn affair, for Jane told them in lamentable detail the circumstances of Mrs. Garnet's attack. Walter could not dismiss from his mind the look of the frail face on the pillow and its childlike smile of happiness. A sudden weariness fell upon him, and he went to bed early. He just looked in upon his mother. "You mustn't do more than say good-night," said the nurse. He bent and kissed his mother. She murmured a little pet name of his childhood, which he had not heard from her for years, and added, "I am so glad you came, darling."

At some dead hour of the night, Walter, in and through his dreams, had a feeling of someone drawing near. A little knocking came at the door. He cried out, "Come in," and Mrs. Goring, wrapped in a cloak, came quickly in with a candle. "Will you come down at once," she said. "She is failing fast—do not lose time—I will light your candle." She put her hand on his shoulder and looked into his face. Walter flung some clothes on, and a moment later was in his mother's room. She was sitting up, propped by pillows, and the nurse was at the far side of the bed, holding something in her hands. Walter knelt down beside his mother, and took her hand in his. She did not open her eyes or speak,

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but sobbed once or twice, and drew her knees up in the bed. Then she opened her eyes and saw him. He rose to his feet, put his arm round her and kissed her; and as he did so, her head fell back on the pillow, and her hand seemed to weigh down his own. He did not need to be told that all was over, and presently Mrs. Goring led him gently away.

VII

THE days that followed were to Walter like a strange and sickening dream. He became aware that he had never suffered before from real grief in his life, and had never guessed what a dumb and poisonous malady it was. It was not that his mother had actively participated in his life, but the loss of the one person whose love for him was continuous and absolutely reliable—for he was aware that he had been constantly in her mind, and that she had been unable to discern any fault in him—was, he felt, like losing the sun. The sun does not occupy a large share of one's waking thoughts, but for it to disappear would be a strange undoing of life.

The funeral was at Cressage, and a great crowd of people assembled to say farewell to one who was very widely and deeply loved. Walter went through it all with the same dull sense of unreality, shook hands, smiled, spoke to a great number of people; and later in the day was seized with a fatigue so intense that it drowned all thought. Nothing at all seemed to have the smallest interest for him. He got through the evening somehow, slept like a log; and in the dawn, angry with a lurid brightness, he felt the pangs of regret and loss sink into his spirit like red-hot iron. He rose from his bed, went to stand beside his mother's grave, the ugly day peering through the fast fading wreaths of flowers, and felt death to be a hideous thing in its cruel silence—a silence impossible to interrogate.

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Mr. Worsley had a brief talk with him in the morning. The good man was pale and dark-eyed, and Walter found himself wondering as to what precise form his grief, which was evidently sincere, took. He could hardly feel it had a personal tinge. He also interviewed Cousin Jane, and found that she would gladly take up her abode at Thurston for the present, until Walter should decide what to do with the house. Cousin Jane had felt Mrs. Garnet's death in her own way, but Walter became aware that his invitation opened before Jane a long and delightful prospect of examining the contents of cupboards and peeping into locked drawers.

Clare visibly avoided him. Helen was the only one of the circle who approached him naturally, but Walter found himself rather dreading her sympathy. He did not want to talk about his mother, and still less about himself. He wanted to bear his own sorrow alone, and to turn a decent front upon the world.

He did indeed pay one visit to the house in Thurston, to interview the old servants, and to see if there were any papers. But Mrs. Garnet had left no will, nor any memorandum of her wishes. She was not one who turned to the future for consolation; and standing in the desolate house, Walter felt a sense of sharp rebellion against the barbarity of death, and the grim unconditioned need for accepting life on its own terms. His mother's life had been so innocent, and happy with an increasing happiness—and not only that, but truly useful in its natural and overflowing sympathy. He had in that dark hour a revelation of the extraordinary value to the world of a life of mere uncriticizing and disinterested love, without any intellectual programme or any scheme of social improvement. And yet how rare it was! Walter thought that of all those he knew, perhaps Helen came nearest to it; though with it came a sense of

shame at the thought that life on such terms, without work, or art, or intellectual companionship, or sharp individual predilections, would be an impossible business for himself, however beautiful it might seem to be in another.

Mr. Goring thought it necessary to pay Walter a call, saying that he felt it his duty to offer spiritual consolation; but it seemed to trouble Mr. Goring's mind that Mrs. Garnet had had so slight a hold upon Christian dogma, and so indefinite an idea of the privileges conferred by Churchmanship. Walter did not feel in the least indignant at the fact that Mr. Goring seemed entirely to overlook the significance of Mrs. Garnet's life and her power of affection. In fact, he derived a certain bitter amusement in probing the depths of Mr. Goring's theories. "You may naturally," said Mr. Goring, "feel disquieted at this sudden call to the future life coming to one whose acquaintance with the very title-deeds of the faith was so slender. I made more than one attempt to explain these important facts—the only groundwork of any reasonable faith—to your mother; but though she expressed her gratitude, I could not be certain of her adherence. But in the case of so naturally benevolent and kindly a character, we may interpret with some liberality the doctrine of uncovenanted mercies."

"You think there may be ground for hope?" said Walter, with a sense of amazement verging on derision.

"I should venture to believe so," said Mr. Goring gravely. "It is hard, of course, to judge in the absence of any apparent intellectual comprehension. But that is a matter which we may—nay, we must—leave unsolved. And I would add that I have made it the subject of much special intercession."

Mrs. Goring was more of a comfort. To begin with, she did not talk in the tone which so many used, as if Walter

had been recovering from some dangerous illness; and she was the only person who retained her sense of humour.

"I am afraid," she said, "that William has been troubling you with some speculations as to your dear mother's doctrinal position. Dear man, he has been much concerned about it. Of course the fact that your mother was the only person I have ever known who was fit to walk straight into heaven (whatever it may be) doesn't seem to him to matter very much. Yet William is deeply affectionate, and burst into tears when I told him about your mother's death. But it is no good distressing oneself about the way people are made, and I let William talk. He is fit for heaven, too, in his own way, and his intellectual cobwebs are very harmless. We shall all want dusting, when the time comes."

Walter smiled. "I should like to talk to you some day a little about my mother—but not yet."

"No, don't hurry it. It has been a frightful shock to you; I can see that, Walter. But it is no good pretending that one knows what one doesn't know. You see to me dear Emily is just as much alive as ever; it isn't that I have any idea what disembodied life means, but the extinction of any life like hers is utterly inconceivable."

"It isn't that," said Walter, "it is the destruction of personality which hurts me. I don't even care to think of my mother as alive, unless she is exactly the same mother that I knew. I don't want her to be wiser or better. I don't even want to think of her as an Anglo-Catholic now."

Mrs. Goring smiled and shook her head. "Don't let us talk about it, dear. But I wish all sorts of things about you. I don't want you to get morbid. I wish you were not so lonely. If you could only be married! Your mother once said that to me—she said, 'Oh, dear, what a

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good Granny I should make!" Nothing that could happen to you would have pleased her more than your marriage."

"One can't get married to please other people, however much one loves them."

"No, but you can open your mind to the idea. I have sometimes thought that you felt money to be the obstacle. Now that obstacle doesn't exist."

"I suppose not," said Walter. "No, the obstacle is my own self-centred and fastidious mind. I couldn't marry unless I felt life to be unendurable without one particular companion."

"Oh, Walter—trust your impulses."

"And be sorry afterwards?"

"You wouldn't be sorry; it would be a great relief to you. You would behave decently, whatever happened."

The thought of Helen was much in Walter's mind in these days. But there were two things which held him back. He thought that if she had been the same frank and buoyant creature that she was when he first knew her, he could have put his fate in her hands. But Helen was not the same. There was a sense of vague trouble about her, a touch of anxiety and distress which was more felt than seen. Then she was certainly not less beautiful—she was more beautiful, he often thought—but beautiful in a different way. He had seen her once or twice of late sitting silent with an abstracted gaze. She was paler, larger-eyed, less brimful of energy and life; and somehow her beauty in its new Madonna-like phase, while it appealed to his sense of beauty, was more spiritual and remote, arousing awe rather than desire.

In their talks, too, there was not quite the same spontaneous outrush of happy and delighted thought—a more mysterious sweetness, but less crispness of perception.

Cressage

And behind all, what, he wondered, was her affection for him? That he had never fathomed. Was it a perfect sisterliness of regard? That she should have any eager longing for him he never supposed. He felt that there was a side of him, the trenchant ironical side, which rather displeased her. Walter was well aware that he was not the best judge of his own humour. He had several times given offence when he had meant to be only gently satirical, and there had been times when he had fenced with Clare, when he had felt that Helen was made uncomfortable.

Clare? . . . This pretty child, with her astonishing *naïveté*, her charming inconsequence, her caressing ways, had been becoming more and more of a delight to him. He knew very little about her inner mind, but she had shown a great eagerness for his company. She used to come and sit with him while he worked, professing not to disturb him—sometimes putting the room a little to rights, sometimes sitting quiet with a trivial occupation of her own—and he could not keep his eyes off her childish petulance, her graceful movements, her rebellious hair. She was sweet, as a rose is sweet—and they had walked sometimes in the dusk among the woodways, when she seemed to him to be subtly fragrant through and through. He had never pretended to regard her seriously: she was simply to him like an adorable child.

Mrs. Goring had told him to follow his impulse. But what, after all, did he need a wife for? Lovemaking might be a pleasant interlude. But Walter had a great element of solitariness in him, and he shrank from thus being invaded. He did not want a wife who would seek to know too much about him and his thoughts: he did not want sympathy. He was not deeply interested in women, and their wilful inconsequence had no charm for him. He did not want to woo or to pet . . . his mind went back to a talk with Norton,

who had told him laughingly that he was not fitted for monogamy, but had a nature more akin to the patriarchal instincts of the harem. It was all a very confusing affair, and he was not irresistibly impelled in any direction. And then there came back to him, each time as it were with a shocking novelty, the sense of his loss; and all such plans of domestic happiness fell into dust and ashes; his work was the only thing for which he craved.

The last night before Walter went off to Oxford he spent in the house in Thurston, now his own. But he took no decisive step, said no decisive word. He was in no way adventurous; he liked settled ways and customary relations. To preserve the *status quo* was what he tended to do. He blamed himself for this, or rather noted it in himself with a certain displeasure, but he was reasonable enough to know that no one can cure an unadventurous nature by rash action and subsequent disentanglement. Helen said good-bye to him with a subdued sadness; his silence about his mother's death was a mystery to her. Clare was mute and unresponsive. Mr. Worsley, however, surprised Walter by the warmth and friendliness of his farewell; and sad as the days were, Walter felt that he had reached a secure familiarity with the Worsley family which could never quite lapse away.

He asked Dr. Bowlby to come and see him after dinner, and the talk became by slow degrees a very intimate one. Walter had, of course, no idea of any attachment to Helen on the part of Dr. Bowlby, but in order to elicit an opinion from the doctor on the subject which was most in his thoughts; he told him the story of a friend of his, who after an ardent courtship and a year or two of hectic uxoriousness had fallen into a state of chronic irritability with his wife, a pretty, unintellectual creature, whose pathetic attempts to sym-

pathize with her husband's pursuits had exhausted his patience and consideration.

"Yes," said Dr. Bowlby, "it is not an uncommon case. Nature uses passion for her own physical purposes, and does not appear to pay the smallest heed to any congeniality either of mind or spirit; she casts a sort of spell over the mind. I daresay that in the early months of his marriage your friend was disposed to praise his wife's abilities?"

"Yes," said Walter, smiling. "He used to say that, in spite of having had no particular training, she had an extraordinary natural insight into intellectual matters."

"It is a strange thing," said the doctor. "The tendency of civilization to insist on monogamy seems directly opposed to natural tendencies. You see that as society is now constituted, a man's wife stands in two quite separate relations to him. She is the mother of his children, and she is also his most intimate friend and companion."

"But isn't it possible," said Walter, "to take into account the future companionship? Aren't the happiest marriages those which begin in friendship and end in love?"

"It is decidedly rational," said the doctor, "and no doubt possible. But in my experience it is very rare. The real basis of it all is a certain physical attraction, and that disregards all other considerations. Intellectual marriages are often childless. In fact nature has a sort of contempt for intellect."

"But people can be very good friends without being intellectually equal," said Walter. "Indeed, I think that intellectual people often prefer a less intellectual companion. It gives a husband a chance of showing off uncontradicted, and it gives a wife an agreeable sort of diplomacy."

"Yes," said Dr. Bowlby, "and I think the happiest marriages are those which have a physical attraction and a

certain congruity of spirit. And when two decent and civilized people have to live together, there is a good deal of instinctive compromise. That is, I think, the moral value of marriage. The unhappiest are those which are based upon any reason other than the physical attraction."

"But doesn't that make it a very material affair?" said Walter.

"Yes," said Dr. Bowlby, "that is an inevitable conclusion. The transcendental part of marriage is not marriage at all; it belongs to the domain of friendship."

"But," said Walter, "if you were asked to give practical advice—imagine a man who believes in a general way in marriage and wants a home, but who does not experience any great physical attraction."

"Well," said Dr. Bowlby, "in a general way I should advise him to remain a bachelor, unless he felt very sure of his friendship with his destined wife. And that can lead to incredibly difficult complications. I have known people marry on reasonable grounds, and then one of them may fall under the physical attraction—that can be a great tragedy."

"But I suppose it is much more important for a woman to be a mother than for a man to be a father?"

"Of course," said Dr. Bowlby. "A woman's nature and the main source of her happiness are concentrated on maternity to a degree of which you and I can form very little idea. Only abnormal men are really concentrated on sex—and to my mind that is the most acute problem of the modern world. As long as morality declares for monogamy, a large number of women are condemned to sterility and unhappiness. They are the real martyrs of society; and the worst part of it is that this unhappiness, instead of leading women to consider how it could be removed, tends

to lead them into a resentful kind of sex-antagonism. That is the revenge which nature takes on morality. People talk with aversion or compassion about the victims of man's viciousness; they tend to deride the victim of men's morality."

"It seems rather a grim business," said Walter.

"It is," said Dr. Bowlby. "Nature is not sentimental and she is not rational. She goes her own way. No one but a doctor, and not all doctors, know what the ravages of thwarted normality are—and many of the victims do not know it themselves. The mediæval glorification of virginity is a very dreadful sort of Moloch."

"But what about men?" said Walter.

"Oh, they matter much less. It is much more easy for them to transmute energy into different channels. They don't lose their souls in the process. But of course I am only generalizing. There are many cases which lie quite outside classification. That is why doctoring is so interesting—the cases that don't conform to any rule."

This conversation made a very deep impression upon Walter; and it struck him at the time that there was a certain sternness, almost resentment, underlying Dr. Bowlby's words. He felt inclined to re-echo the words of Carlyle about De Quincey, "Ecco! This child has been in hell!"

VIII

HELEN, the day after Walter had gone to Oxford went out for a solitary walk—one of the many walks that she connected with Walter. She could almost imagine him walking rapidly and gesticulating as he talked; he had very expressive hands, and Helen fancied that she could almost tell his mood from the look and motion of them. She was a little happier than she had been of late, though she was ashamed of confessing even to herself the reason. Walter had not opened his mind to her about his mother's death—indeed, he seemed involved in a cloud of solitariness. But he had sought her company, and had seemed content to be with her, while Clare seemed to have rather fallen out of sight.

It was a still autumn day, the woods showing splashes and patches of gold among the green. Little mists lay in the depths of the woodlands and over the forest pools. The air was so calm and fresh that Helen felt a new tide of wholesome vigour flow into her spirit.

She came in at the gate; and as she stood for a moment, regarding the house, which looked so dignified in its settled peace, with the smoke going up from the chimneys, she heard the great chestnut in the court stir and rustle, and the sharp soft thud of the falling nuts in the grass. An irresistible wish came over her to go up to Walter's room; she went lightly up the turret-stair, opened the old door with its low lintel, and went quickly in.

Cressage

At the table sat Clare in Walter's chair, her head bowed over her hands—she could just see the curve of her cheek under her hair. She sat up quickly at the sound of the footsteps, and turned to Helen a blurred and tearful face, with the fretful curve of mouth that one sees in a petulant child. The two looked at each other for a moment. Helen took a step forward with hand outstretched. "What is the matter, dear?" she said.

"You know what is the matter," said Clare. "Why did you come here?—to spy on me?"—and she put Helen's hand aside, and sat drumming on the table with her fingers.

Helen was deeply moved, and knelt down beside Clare, putting one arm round her. Clare resisted no longer. "Whatever happens," said Helen, "we mustn't go on like this."

"Oh, Helen," said Clare, the tears starting out afresh, "I can't bear to think that Walter is gone—and all these last days he wouldn't notice me or speak to me, and he said good-bye as if he hardly knew me. I simply can't bear that he should treat me so—and you were always about with him; I think it was horribly selfish of you when you knew what I felt."

"What was I to do?" said Helen. "Walter talked very little to me. I don't think he wanted anyone—he doesn't like sympathy; it only reminds him of his trouble. He just wanted a companion. It was an effort to him to talk at all—and he is more used to me, perhaps; you see, he has known me longer."

"You think that was all?" said Clare. "I know it was partly my fault. I kept out of his way. I can't bear people to be anxious and miserable. But you think he cares for me a little, don't you?"

Cressage

"I am sure he does," said Helen.

"But, Helen," went on Clare, her eyes still brimming with tears, "I am sure you don't care for him in the way I do. Yes, I know you are very fond of him, but that isn't the same. I woke up this morning, long before I was called, and thought how dull and wretched it would be without him. He put his arm round me once as I stood beside his chair, and said I lit up the place, and I kissed him then, and many times after—though he never kissed me first." And the tears broke out afresh.

"Well, darling," said Helen, realizing in a sudden flash what a child Clare still was, "we shall soon have him back again—and meantime we will think what we can do."

"There's only one thing to do," said Clare. "I think Walter feels bound to you in some way or other, and you must set him free somehow to do as he likes. Can't you explain to him what I feel about him?"

"I am not bound to Walter or he to me in any way," said Helen, "and if I were to say anything about setting him free, he would think he had not been free. You see that, don't you? But I think I can explain it a little to him."

"It seems so wicked to me," said Clare, "that men should go about admiring and liking girls, and waiting to pick and choose. Why shouldn't we have the pick too? It is so hateful that a man may say what he likes to us, and that we can't say a word to him."

"I think we sometimes do," said Helen; "but, after all, a man can't choose us against our will. And if we had the choice, they would have to have the right to say 'No.'"

"They wouldn't often dare to," said Clare.

Helen shook her head. "But you must promise me, Clare, that you won't come and shut yourself up here and make yourself miserable—that is no use at all."

Cressage

"Then why did you come here?" said Clare. "Did you come here to dance a *pas seul* because you were so glad that Walter had gone?"

"I really don't know quite why I did come here," said Helen. "It just came into my head. But what do you think about this? I know Dr. Bowlby wants papa to have a little change. We might persuade him to go away for a little and take us two. Then we shan't be able to make ourselves mournful about the empty chair."

"I don't believe you mind Walter's having gone a bit," said Clare. "I don't feel as if I wanted to go away anywhere just now."

Helen determined that she would contrive to get Dr. Bowlby to order Mr. Worsley away. She was a good deal distressed by her discovery of Clare's feeling. She could not bring herself to think that it was very deeply rooted, though it was undoubtedly intense. But it was one thing to possess Walter's confidence, and another to seem, by anything she said, to compromise him, or to push her sister into his arms. She did not somehow feel that Clare was in the least suited to Walter or Walter to her, and then she spent a miserable half-hour in trying to think whether this was only a sort of jealousy trying to assume a high-minded position.

She felt that she could not decide what to do without talking to Mrs. Goring. The next day she went over to the Vicarage, and found Mrs. Goring deep in calculations as to how to get a new carpet and curtains without Mr. Goring perceiving it, or in any case without knowing that he had paid for it.

Helen asked what she was doing. "Oh, contriving," said Mrs. Goring. "I must keep the house decent, or William censures me, and I must not spend money, or he prays for me."

Cressage

"Why not say you must have a carpet?"

"Because he would only suggest that the old one should be turned. He is incredibly ignorant. He brought me an old coat the other day, and asked me to observe that it had what he called a little coat inside it, meaning the lining. Didn't I think it could be taken out and made into a little summer jacket for him?"

"I want to bother you again," said Helen. "What am I to do?"—and she described how she found Clare in tears in Walter's room.

"She thought I was selfish in keeping Walter tied to myself—she thought I might set him free."

"Clare won't break her heart," said Mrs. Goring. "But we must treat her with the respect due to children. Tell me frankly, would Walter marry her?"

"He might," said Helen, "if he thought he had encouraged her. She is extraordinarily fascinating when she chooses to be."

"The young men come about her like bees," said Mrs. Goring, "and one never can tell. Marriage might alter her; but what I fear might happen is that she would expect constant attention, and might make a great mess of Walter's life. He doesn't want a wife—he wants a companion. The Hagar arrangement would suit him much better."

"I doubt if Walter would have turned Hagar out," said Helen.

"Abraham had no choice," said Mrs. Goring. "But I think he should have expressed some regret. I can never think that Abraham behaved quite like a gentleman. But as Maurice said, the temptation of the spiritual man in all ages is to behave like a liar and a sneak. I wander from the point. The question, dear Helen, is what *you* feel about it."

"I don't know, Mary. I am very unhappy just now.

Cressage

I seem to be getting in everyone's way. I know my father expects me to marry Walter. I don't think Walter wants to marry anyone: and I don't know whether I am in love with him or not, while I am quite sure that Clare is."

"These men!" said Mrs. Goring. "It is dreadful to think that they should ever have to decide anything. That is the one thing they cannot do; and if they do, they suffer from regret, even from repentance. They are the creatures of impulse. Now if I decide anything, I may have my regrets, but I never repent. And then there is the idiotic regard that men have for verbal accuracy. They never understand that the letter killeth. About such things all good women are wholly unscrupulous."

"And then there is another thing," said Helen. "It's no good not mentioning everything. My father expects me to marry Walter; but if that were to break down, he would be consoled if Walter married Clare. If Walter married someone else altogether, papa would be wretched. I can't understand my father. His heart is set on founding a family, I think; and he doesn't like having dispossessed Walter. The whole frame of mind is so inconceivable to me, that I can't even imagine it. I think men's code of honour is so curious. There is no reason why, if papa feels as he does, he should not offer the estate to Walter, or even leave it to him. But Walter would not dream of accepting it. I can't understand this sense of sacredness about property."

"Yes, that's another male mystery," said Mrs. Goring. "It is simply there, and has to be accepted. But, Helen dear, this is a great complication. I will tell you one thing frankly. If I thought you really loved Walter, I myself should make him marry you, whatever he felt. That would be easy; but I don't feel sure enough about you. In fact, if you loved Walter, you would not be able to talk about it

Cressage

all as you do. I am afraid I can't consider your father—he must be disappointed if necessary—but I see that you must consider him. And then about Clare. You must be very careful what you say to Walter, or you will make him marry her; and I doubt if Clare is the right girl for him; and you mustn't do it out of a wild generosity. Men and women have the right to give themselves away, if they choose to. But one must not give other people away. You see, I think that if you married Walter, you would probably both be happy; but, on the other hand, I think you might be very unhappy, if there wasn't enough love, on one side at least; and I am aware, too, that if I made Walter offer himself to you, I couldn't also make you take him. Good Heavens, was ever a love affair talked about so plainly? It is like the kind of conversation I have with the grocer about bacon. What would William or your father or Walter think of the delicacy of women if they heard us talk? They would have expected to see us both bathed in tears and blushes, and to hear us saying, "Then you think?" "Oh, no not that!" "Well then!"—they would think even that sailing near the wind."

Helen laughed. "What a comfort it is to talk plainly!" she said. "I will write a letter to Walter and show it you. I must do something. Clare has no doubt been very forthcoming, but I can't have her crying all alone in the gate-house over Walter's behaviour."

"Does Walter know that you know?" said Mrs. Goring.
"More or less."

"Well, Clare will get over it. What about those dreadful young men from Thurston?"

"Oh, Walter has quite put her off them."

"I could not see her yielding to the blandishments of Harry Saxby without a struggle," said Mrs. Goring, "though

Cressage

I honestly believe they would be happy together. Clare's husband should have a touch of the fool about him."

They kissed and parted. "Whatever you do," said Mrs. Goring, "don't be solemn about this. It is great fun planning it all, but I expect there will be a bolt from the blue—there generally is."

"DEAREST WALTER" (*Helen wrote*),—

I can't tell you how much we all miss you. Papa is quite preoccupied, Miss Haden has reasserted her moral supremacy. I don't know what to do with myself except pay duty calls, and I found Clare in tears at the thought of how selfish I had been in keeping you so much to myself. I know, dear Walter, it has been a bad time for you, and that you could not talk about what has happened. I did not expect you to, though I myself miss dear Mrs. Garnet so much that I find it hard not to speak of her. I would like you to know how much she is missed in Thurston. She gave people there what they had never had before, an absolutely unselfish affection. She did not want to influence anyone or to help them even, which always means a sense of superiority. She only wanted people to be kind to each other and happy, and there are several friends of hers who will try to continue to do this for the sake of her memory and her love. This is all I will say now. I hope you will have a good term, and that you are already interested in your work.

Your loving HELEN.

BOOK IV

I

IN November, when the woods were all bare, and when on still days the valley below the Manor was often brimmed with blue silvery mists, the house began to seem to Helen like a forlorn and guarded fortress. Her plans about getting Mr. Worsley to go away had come to nothing. There were few callers, and fewer visitors could be enticed from their own firesides. A mood of constant depression settled down upon her, mixed with a dull sense of shame that she could not make a better show of resistance.

Walter had answered her letter very lightly, saying that he was touched by the grief that his departure had caused, and that he too would like to devote at least a day a week to penitential sorrow, but his work did not admit of it. He evidently did not take the matter seriously.

Helen began to feel her own vitality ebbing away in the absence of all active interests. Neither her father nor Clare seemed to need her at all. Mr. Worsley had gone back to long hours of work. Helen more than once remonstrated with him, but he said that he now worked much more slowly and deliberately, and always stopped the moment he felt tired. He was sure, he said, that it suited him much better to have his mind occupied. He was always kind and good-natured, but Helen had in old days been the conversational mainstay of the party; and now she often had the lamentable sense that she had little or nothing to

Cressage

say. She found herself considering one threadbare subject after another, and deciding that the effort of putting them into words was hardly worth while. Walter wrote to her regularly, and she fancied that he was also writing to Clare. Clare had formed a close secret alliance with Miss Haden, spent much time in her company, and made little or no attempt to talk to Helen at all. Helen tried to occupy herself in reading, but she began to find that the morbid element in novels and biographies, episodes where human beings found themselves involved in a struggle against intangible evil, were the only records or situations that had any sort of attraction for her. If it had not been for Mrs. Goring, she thought she would have lost her courage altogether; but even Mrs. Goring was in no sense free; for, as she told Helen, her husband had often very little to say to her, but manifested both irritation and uneasiness if she was not at hand whenever he required her.

"I think I shall really have to find some work for myself away from home," Helen said once to Mrs. Goring.

"Are you very unhappy, dear?"

"Yes, but I don't quite know why. I used to be happy enough about nothing; but now everything is always the same, and no one at home seems to want my opinion on any point. My father is occupied in work, and Clare is always with Miss Haden."

"Shall I speak a word to any of them?"

"No, dear Mary; if they began throwing bones to a dog out of sheer pity, the dog wouldn't even have the heart to gnaw them. I am the only person who can help myself. They would be willing enough to listen to me, if I had anything to say; but they seem to be living comfortably in burrows of their own."

Cressage

“What about Walter?”

“Oh, he is very good; he writes regularly, but every week I feel further away from him.”

“I don’t want you to go away from home, Helen. You may not feel it, but you are the pillar of the house.”

“I wish they needed me a little less, and wanted me a little more! It is very self-conscious, but I feel I am wasting everything—my time, my energy, my spirit. I feel there is a great deal of life bubbling up in me, but it all runs away down a waste-pipe of its own.”

One evening after tea, Mr. Worsley had drifted off to his work, and Clare with Miss Haden had betaken themselves to the so-called schoolroom. Helen was sitting alone by the fire, trying to lose herself in a book, when her father came in and asked if he might speak to her. She followed him to his study listlessly, wondering what small worry he wanted her to disentangle. He used to confide to her sympathetic ear any little friction with tenants or domestic problems, though they were seldom of an interesting kind. But this time it was evidently something more serious; and Helen wondered, as she had often done before, at the nervousness and circumlocution with which her father approached a discussion involving any show of emotion, with a daughter with whom he had at all events more in common than he had with any other human being.

The study was a dark panelled room. Mr. Worsley whose eyes were somewhat weak, was distressed by diffused light; and all the light in the room, except the dull glow of a smouldering fire, was concentrated into the circle illuminated on the table by a big lamp, which showed the neat and precise arrangements of the owner, the shelf of law-books,

Cressage

the stationery-case, the heaps of docketed papers, the elaborate silver inkstand—no hint of any human affinity or underlying beauty.

Mr. Worsley sat at the table with some papers before him, and Helen watched his hands, firm and expressive in outline and control, as he untied his packet. She sat down in a big leather arm-chair beside the fire, so that his face was not turned to her, but appeared in profile, and to a great extent in shadow.

"I have been completing my will, Helen," he said. "You may remember a conversation I had with you when I was taken ill. I have not recurred to the subject, which is perhaps an agitating one for both of us—or at least a delicate one to discuss."

He was silent a moment, and then went on: "Has the affair—you understand me?—of which we spoke at that time, in any way developed? You must forgive me if I appear to touch on subjects which must be your own peculiar and intimate concern."

"No, papa," said Helen, feeling as she did so a little pang as to the inevitable disappointment she must inflict on him. "I can't say that it has. I am the best of friends with Walter, and I believe he is really very much attached to all of us, but that is all."

"Has he ever spoken to you about such things?"

"No; he doesn't speak about his hopes for the future, nor indeed about anything which he feels very deeply. He speaks very freely about things of which other people do not talk easily, and that perhaps misleads others into thinking him confidential."

"I do not quite understand you."

"What I mean, papa, is that he talks about people freely, about little vexations, small problems of all sorts—and then

Cressage

you think he is telling you everything, but he is not. He has only once said a few words to me about his mother."

"Does he speak about his Oxford friends and acquaintances?"

"Yes, a good deal."

Mr. Worsley sat in silence for a little, and then, resuming, he said: "I want you to understand my position in all this, dear Helen; I do not think you will deny me your sympathy, and indeed I feel no doubt that you will co-operate with me as far as you can. . . . I owe a great deal to old Mr. Garnet. He was the first of the County people who by giving me his confidence brought our firm to the front—and then I had a great personal admiration for him. I could not save him from ruining his estate, and it is to me a very bitter thought that I should seem to profit by that. It would be the happiest day of my life if, through an alliance with my family, Walter could be restored to his ancestral estates; both on that account and on my own account I should rejoice. You know, no doubt, though it is not a thing of which I care to speak, that our own family has only very recently emerged into anything like consideration. My grandfather had a small emporium (Mr. Worsley could not bring himself to call it a shop) in Shrewsbury. My father entered our business—then a small one—as a clerk. Of my own part I will not speak. But I will confess that it is with the deepest pride and satisfaction that I find myself, in so short a space of time, ranking among the leading landowners of the district. This does not seem to me merely a convenient thing; it is a result which embraces my deepest and strongest aspirations."

"But, papa," said Helen, much moved by the awed solemnity of his tone, "if you feel like this, could you not

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make over, or leave by will, the estate to Walter? Clare and I should have, I daresay, enough to live upon; and I personally should be delighted that Walter should have it. I myself feel a certain sense of shame—as if we had superseded him!”

“But should not that latter feeling induce you perhaps to co-operate more effectively with me in the matter?—though I will not press that. I will only say that your generous notion of handing back the estate to Walter would mean an offer which with no degree of propriety he could accept—that is part of the chivalry, which in these old families it is easy to perceive, but by no means easy instinctively to feel.”

“It all seems rather a muddle, papa! We seem prevented from doing all sorts of generous and reasonable things by these intangible barriers.”

“That, Helen, to me, makes the sanctity of it; intangible they may be, but the barriers are indubitably there.”

“Yes, they are there!”

“But, Helen, I venture to repeat this because I cannot be unaware—indeed I have other first-hand evidence—that there may be other suitors, whom one in your position, with all your natural and acquired advantages, you must inevitably attract. I will say no more on that head . . . but it is a great distress to me to feel so near to the accomplishment of my hopes and desires, and yet so far removed from it. I have not been lacking, I hope, in any consideration for yourself. Could you not co-operate more effectively with me?”

“I could not pretend to be in love with Walter, when I am not; and still less could I try to make him think himself in love with me, if he is not. You would not wish me to do that?”

Cressage

"I would not wish any stratagems or disingenuous advances to be made—but can you not feel with me, Helen? Can you not regard the fulfilment of my aspirations as weighing anything in the scale of your duty?"

"Yes, papa, I *do* feel with you, I can't say how much. I deeply wish you to have what you desire; but the one thing I could not do, which seems the only thing that could be done, is to pretend to love Walter, if I do not. I am very fond of Walter, more attached to him than to anyone outside of my home—indeed, I feel as if he belonged to my home—but that isn't the same thing as becoming his wife—nor could I try to persuade him that he ought to marry me by pretending that I am in love with him."

"You express it too bluntly, Helen. The difference between friendship and love is not so great, after all."

"They seem to me very different."

"I will not argue it. Of course I do not want you to do anything which you feel to be repugnant; but Walter seems to me the sort of young man I could easily love, if I were in your place."

Mr. Worsley spoke rather coldly, nor did he raise his eyes from the papers before him.

After a moment he went on. "Perhaps, too, you think that possessions and position are unimportant things. Youth is very Quixotic about such matters. But, dear Helen, there you should trust my experience. You have always enjoyed something of a position; you have not had to raise yourself by patient effort, as I have done. To have the esteem and honour of one's neighbours is not a little thing."

"But don't people win this by what they do and what they are, more than by what they have? Dr. Bowlby, for instance—is not he far more trusted and honoured than many more important people?"

Cressage

"I would rather not bring the personal element in, Helen. Dr. Bowlby is a most reliable man, but he has no position worth the name. However, I will not try to persuade you further. You know my wishes, and it is for you to decide how far you can further them."

"Oh, papa," said Helen, "don't think like that! I know how hard you have worked, and how perfectly kind and good you have been to me; it makes me miserable even to seem to resist you. But love is a thing which is beyond one's power to deal with—the kind of love, I mean, that makes marriage possible. I would do anything in the world I could to please you; but there is one line that one can't cross, unless it is one's own will to do so."

"I will not press you, Helen," said Mr. Worsley. "You have been the best of daughters to me."

He sat in a dejected attitude, leaning over his papers, with so baffled a look that Helen's whole heart went out to him. He sighed to himself, and began to put the papers together.

Helen had been wondering whether she ought to speak to him about Clare, and this decided her.

"There is one thing I ought to say, papa," she said. "Would you feel contented if Walter were to marry Clare?"

He raised his head and looked at her.

"Clare? Clare?" he said, "she is a mere child, and childish in all her ways. Walter would have no thought of marrying her."

"She is very fond of him—and he of her," said Helen. "I think he is quite as likely to wish to marry her as me."

"It is for you that I desire it," he said. "You would be a great help to Walter in all ways. * You would be worthy of him, but Clare has no sense of responsibility."

Cressage

"She might get it," said Helen, "but I do not feel sure either that she would be a companion to him."

"If you could not marry Walter," said Mr. Worsley, "and if he chose to marry Clare, I should not like it so well, but I should prefer it to an outside match. What makes you think she cares for him?"

"She has told me so."

"I can hardly anticipate that Walter would think of her as a wife. But I would rather not speak further of this to-day; it is an agitating subject."

"You are not feeling unwell?" said Helen, rising and going to his side.

"Not particularly; but I am seldom well, my dear. My life is at best an uncertain one. But I could die happily if the wish of my heart were fulfilled."

Helen put her arm round him, bent down and kissed him. Then, as he said no more, she quietly withdrew, with another weight upon her heart.

The following morning, Miss Haden came hurriedly in about eleven o'clock to tell Helen that Mr. Worsley had had another bad attack, when she had been reading the paper to him. She had sent for Dr. Bowlby. Helen hastened to her father, and found him propped up with pillows struggling for breath. He seemed to her worse than she had ever seen him before, his eyes closed, his lips parted, and the sweat standing out on his brow. She did what she could, and a little later Dr. Bowlby arrived. Helen could see that he was alarmed by her father's state. He sent her away, and half an hour later joined her in her room.

"It has been a very bad attack, Miss Helen," he said—

Cressage

"the worst he has yet had—but it is passing off, and I do not think there is any danger now. But it must be admitted that his condition is a precarious one. Do you know if anything has occurred to upset him?"

"Yes," said Helen, "he had a long talk with me yesterday evening, and seemed much exhausted by it."

"An ordinary talk?" said Dr. Bowlby, "or was it a talk likely to agitate him?"

"I am afraid it was."

"But, Miss Helen, you must somehow prevent that. That he should be agitated is the worst thing for him."

"It is difficult to know what to do; I did not begin it; but it seems equally impossible either not to listen, or to stop him."

"You would not care to tell me what he talked about?"

Helen looked at him. The doctor's plain, solid face was irradiated by kindness and sympathy.

"Yes, Dr. Bowlby, I will tell you, though it is a difficult thing to talk about to anyone. My father very much wishes me to marry Walter Garnet."

"Do you mean that Walter is pressing it, and that you refuse—forgive me if I ask too much—but if I am to advise, I must know how things stand."

Helen smiled. "No, Walter has made no sign. He and I are the best of friends, but that is all. My father does not realize that two people can care very much about each other and yet have no thought of marriage."

"Do you know why he so much desires it?"

"I think my father has a great devotion to the Garnet family. The old Squire was the making of him. He has a painful feeling that he has in a way dispossessed Walter, and this, he thinks, would clear it off. He has set his heart upon it. What am I to do?"

Cressage

"You must follow your own heart in this matter, Miss Helen. This is not a thing where you ought to be influenced by any wish to please your father. It is no one's duty to marry against their will—that is a sacrifice which no one can be asked to make."

"My father is very much to be pitied. He has worked very hard all his life, and has had very little happiness. Now that he has come within reach of his ambition, everything goes wrong. No one will take the simple and obvious step he would wish them to take."

"I see how difficult it is; but you can't give up your life and yourself simply because it is so pathetic that your father cannot get his way. I say plainly that it is not a mere matter of doing violence to a passing emotion—it is a sin, and worse than a sin, to marry without love."

Helen looked at him. "Thank you, Dr. Bowlby," she said; "that is the first solid ground I have had to stand on."

"At the same time I would say this," said Dr. Bowlby, "that it need not be a passionate emotion to justify a marriage. I have known of happy marriages made without passion, but you can trust your instinct."

"What instinct?" said Helen. "The position is that Walter has not made love to me, and I could not try to make him do so. But if he were to come to me and say that he could not be happy unless I married him, I think I would yield to that."

"I do not see that you can *do* anything at all," said Dr. Bowlby. "You must await events. That is not a pleasant thing to do; but it is a thing we have, most of us, to spend our lives in doing. But now that you have given me your confidence, which I treasure greatly, will you not be content to leave matters as they are? You can speak to me at any time, and I would do anything to help matters. You do

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not know how willingly I would carry the burden myself, if I could."

He smiled at her with his big, anxious, sweet-tempered smile, and seemed to envelope her with sympathy and understanding.

"Yes," said Helen, "I *can* leave it so; and I can hardly tell you how grateful I am for giving me just the sort of support I want."

They parted, with that long and steady glance of equal friendship which knows no shamefacedness.

A few minutes later she was with her father, whose colour had returned, and who was lying in a tranquil exhaustion. He glanced up at her and said, "Helen dear, don't blame yourself about this. It was not what you said last night that agitated me. You only said what was natural and right. It was my foolishness in raising a question which cannot be settled by argument or even by goodwill."

Helen bent over him and kissed him on the cheek, shedding grateful tears.

II

MR. WORSLEY did not make a rapid recovery, and Helen was much taken up with looking after him. Clare never assumed any responsibility in the matter. She told Helen with the utmost frankness that to spend much time with people who were ill in bed made her feel ill herself. She used to flutter into the room, make a few remarks to her father, present him with a flower, and whisk away again; yet Helen found that these little visits cheered her father more than her own quieter ministrations. But to Helen's surprise, she found that the unhappy cloud which had rested over her own spirits was now gradually lifting, and she attributed this largely to the definite duties of reading to her father, and taking down his directions on points of business which were submitted to him. She saw a good deal of Dr. Bowlby in these days, and his quiet companionship was a great help to her. His very presence seemed to evoke the best side both of Mr. Worsley and Helen herself. Some peaceful influence seemed to flow from the big rough-hewn man, his curt questions and brief replies and his slow-coming smile. Helen once asked him to what extent Mr. Worsley ought to be allowed to talk about his symptoms. "Why," he said, "most doctors discourage it—they think that to put thoughts into definite words rather stamps the fact upon the ailing mind—but I don't quite take this view. People who are ill accumulate a certain amount of ashes, so to speak, in twenty-four hours. Their twinges

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of pain, their sense of weakness, their anxiety about themselves are like a slow fire; and my idea is that this should all be cleared out every day; it is when they begin to discuss their symptoms artistically, as a psychological problem, that they should be checked—but the cinders should be raked out!”

Walter wrote cheerfully from Oxford. He had decided for the present to keep on the house at Thurston. Cousin Jane had suggested that she should pay a little sum towards the expenses of the house, and remain on as an informal housekeeper. She said with grim humour that she had consulted her friends, and that though it was ostensibly improper that she should keep house for a young unmarried relation, who was outside the prohibited matrimonial degrees, yet if Walter would run the risk, she thought she could preserve her reputation unblemished.

Walter was to return early in December; he was pressed to stay at the Manor, but he preferred to spend a fortnight or so at home, going through a quantity of family papers which his mother had hoarded, but that, if they approved, he would spend his Christmas with them. It was arranged, however, that the two girls, and Mr. Worsley, if he was well enough, should come down to lunch with him on the day after his arrival.

The day arrived. Mr. Worsley did not feel well enough to go down; and, much to Helen's surprise, Clare at the last moment decided that she did not feel well enough either to come. Clare had by this time more or less established herself in the sitting-room in the gate-house, and when Miss Haden told Helen that Clare had decided not to go, Helen went over to the gate-house to interview her. She found Clare looking very radiant, ensconced in a deep chair before the fire, idly reading.

Cressage

"I wish you would come down to luncheon at Walter's to-day," said Helen. "I think he will be disappointed—and what am I to say is the matter with you?"

"Whatever you like," said Clare; "say I'm not up to it."

"I never saw you look better in your life," said Helen. "What *is* the matter?"

"Oh, just a lot of little reasons," said Clare. "I don't like Cousin Jane, to begin with; and then I shall be out of it. Walter and you will be *conversing*, and I can't converse. Don't be tiresome about it, Helen; you can walk up with Walter after lunch, and I will explain the whole thing to him in two minutes."

"Very well," said Helen; "but I don't think papa will like it."

"He won't know anything about it," said Clare, "unless you tell him. I shall have some cake here. I hate lunch; it makes people look ugly."

"I have never noticed that in *you*!" said Helen, smiling.

"Well, I *feel* ugly after lunch, which is just as bad."

So Helen went off alone, and got a very warm welcome from Cousin Jane, who admired Helen because she was practical. A moment later Walter came in, and presently asked about Clare.

"She's not very well," said Helen; "but I thought we might walk up after lunch and you could see her."

"Not much amiss?" said Walter; and Helen could see that he was somewhat vexed by Clare's absence.

They lunched together, and Cousin Jane related with vicious emphasis as much of the gossip of the place as she had extracted. "I must warn you," she said to Helen, "that just at present Thurston opinion is unfavourable to your family. It is thought that a professional man like your father should not indulge in quite so leisurely an illness."

Cressage

Your absence from Thurston is condoned, but your sister is thought to be forgetful of her friends here. She declined to act in the Parkinson theatricals, and Mrs. Parkinson says that ever since the Honourable Anne had tea at the Manor, Clare has been very chilly."

"Who on earth is the Honourable Anne?" said Walter.

"Walter, I am surprised at you," said Cousin Jane; "you must have met her—the daughter of the Lord Lieutenant!"

"Oh, Bunny Loraine!" said Walter. "Is she as queer as ever?"

"She came to tea in knickerbockers and leggings," said Helen. "She asked for a boiled egg. She told Clare that she looked like a lap-dog. Clare has done nothing but imitate her ever since."

As soon as luncheon was over, Helen looked round the house with Walter.

"It seems years since we lived here," she said, "and now I feel as if I had been impossibly happy here!"

"Aren't you happy now?"

"I shall feel some day that I was," said Helen, "but I have been anxious about papa lately,—and Clare—I can't quite make her out. She has very little to say to me."

"I hope she is not ill," said Walter, looking a little anxious.

"No, indeed; but she goes her own way more than ever. I can't think how she spends her time; she sits a good deal in the gate-house room now. She isn't bored; in fact, she generally looks as if she had heard some good news which she chose to keep to herself."

They set off about three o'clock, but stopped several times to speak to acquaintances. Helen found herself admiring Walter's good humour, and the pleasant little things he found to say to everyone.

"I wish I were as ready as you," she said. "I find it

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harder and harder to talk without saying anything. It seems a waste of time. But Dr. Bowlby assures me that it doesn't matter what one says, as long as one looks at people and thinks about them."

"How like Bowlby!" said Walter; "but there's a good deal in it. It's the flowing tide, as he would call it! His idea is that what one says is only a surface ripple."

"I don't quite agree," said Helen. "In a railway-carriage, a person who looks surly and disagreeable, often becomes quite pleasant if he says a few words. It dispels the atmosphere of suspicion. And I don't think that if two people were shut up together, and forbidden to speak, they would get to know much about each other."

"It depends upon how much they wanted to know."

As they left the town behind and the road began to ascend the long hill, Helen became conscious of a certain tension. She felt as though Walter had something in his mind to say, which he found difficult to express and perhaps would have preferred not to say at all. They talked inconsequently, and there were awkward gaps which both alike felt the need of trying to fill.

At last it came. "Helen," said Walter, "there is something I want to say to you, but I don't want to press you for an answer. We have been friends a long time now, and I have told you most things that have been in my mind. You have been amazingly good, and I can only say that you have been like a dear sister to me. I have had a good many sharp troubles of one kind and another, and you have taken the sting out of them all."

"No, dear Walter," said Helen. "You have done that for yourself; and what have *you* given to *me*? A real, new, and deep interest in life. I never thought, when we sat that day on the downs, that my promise, which

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I was so afraid of making, was going to mean so much to me."

"That day on the hill," said Walter, "I was desperate. It seemed to me that I had lived all my life without anything real happening to me at all; and I thought there was just one beautiful chance of finding a real friend."

"What about Harry Norton?" said Helen.

"Oh, that is different: with a man-friend it is like going up a staircase together; with you, it was like meeting someone coming down. The secret of the world isn't revealed either to men or to women by themselves—they live in two different worlds—but they can make out something of it together."

"But it remains a secret."

"Yes, but it is like seeing a light in a window when you are wandering in the night. And what I wanted to say was this, Helen. We can't go on being friends like this for ever. Isn't it possible that we might share our experiences, instead of dividing them?"

"Walter dear, I don't know what to say. You are very dear to me—most dear of all . . ." She broke off and her eyes filled with tears. Walter put his arm through hers, and kissed her lightly on the cheek. She looked at him mutely through her tears.

"Helen dear, I won't ask for any answer yet—I don't want to come suddenly upon you, and force you to speak; but you now know what I want and hope for. Let it wait a little."

Helen had a strange sensation. She would have wished to throw her arms round his neck and kiss him, or that he should have flung his arms about her, however roughly. She was ashamed of herself for thinking of it. But this gentle way of winning somehow disappointed her, and yet

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she had never loved Walter so much as she had done at that moment. Her mood bore her upwards, shifted its course; a moment later she was uncertain of herself.

"Then you will think of it, dearest," said Walter. He took her hand in both of his own and kissed it, and they went on together.

Was this then the great moment of life, thought Helen? Did one enter so easily into the enchanted land? It was more like taking a ticket and stepping into a train.

They talked of Mr. Worsley. "It always seems to me so sad," said Helen, "that papa should have slaved all his life as he has done, and gained so much success—and yet he does not seem ever to have come *near* to anyone."

"Your mother?" said Walter.

"Perhaps," said Helen. "I hardly know enough about her. He was very good to her; but she had been ill so long before she died, that my feeling about her is that she always seemed to be occupied in sad thoughts. She was very fond of me, but it was only as if she had looked out of a window and smiled, and then she went back to some weary business of her own within."

"And Clare?" said Walter.

"Father is always puzzled by Clare. He admires her, but Clare is like a child. When she kisses you she is always thinking of something else; you can see it in her eyes. She just submits to being loved, by me at least. But she is greatly devoted to you, Walter; and Clare can only do one thing at a time."

"She's a fascinating child," said Walter. "I never saw anyone move about more beautifully."

"She is more beautiful than ever," said Helen.

"Well, we shall see!"

After tea was over, Walter slipped away with Clare, and

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Helen, who had expected Walter to return, sat with a book beside the fire. The experience of the afternoon brought a glow about her heart, and her first sense of disappointment passed away. She could truthfully say to herself that she loved Walter very much. He was constantly in her thoughts, she delighted in his letters and his talk, and she had a certain sense of pride in his preference for her. As she had said at almost their first meeting, there was something princely about him. He never demanded recognition or deference, he showed a gentle indifference to many of the things for which other men strive and cry, his bearing and his thought moved intently on a higher level; and it was like him, she thought, not to grasp at closer ties, but to come by slow degrees into a finer sort of intimacy. It was not her romantic idea of a courtship, and the thought of marrying him seemed not to excite her—it was rather the next natural step. She was pleased, too, in thinking of her father's pleasure, while the idea that Walter should be returning to his own ancestral position was a relief to her. She was very happy as she moved through tranquil vistas of futurity.

But the time passed on, and Walter did not return. The dressing-bell rang, and eventually she went up to dress. She thought that perhaps he had not meant to urge his suit further—or possibly he had gone on to see Mrs. Goring.

Clare came down to dinner in a silent mood; but there was a triumphant little sparkle in her eye which Helen could not quite interpret. "Did you have a good talk?" she said to Clare.

"Oh, yes; and, by the way, Walter asked me to say that he had to rush off, as someone was coming to dinner."

Mr. Worsley was in a good mood—he was feeling decidedly stronger. Clare said little, and Helen had a

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feeling that Clare was regarding her with a certain curiosity. But a pleasant sense of weariness came upon Helen, with the feeling of relief that at any rate her next step was clear. She fell asleep very quietly, and rising happy and refreshed, regarded from her window the little gate-house at the end of the avenue with a contented feeling that at all events the old home might soon be in Walter's hands again; and then she thought of Walter himself. Whatever might happen, life would not be difficult with him. He never complained, he never had grievances, he was never irritable or unreasonable.

As soon as breakfast was over she walked to the Vicarage to see Mrs. Goring.

"Helen," said Mrs. Goring, "you have some good news for me, I am sure."

"How did you guess that?"

"There is a brightness about you; you look compact. When people are depressed they look as if their hands and feet did not belong to them, but were tied loosely on with string."

Helen laughed. "Walter has spoken to me," she said. "It is all going to be very rational—no raptures and ecstasies—but he would be prepared to spend his life in my company, if I am favourable."

Mrs. Goring looked at her rather curiously.

"That's rather a tepid affair, Helen! It's all very well to take it quietly, but marriage doesn't mean only walks and talks."

Helen threw her arms round Mrs. Goring's neck. "I am not nervous about it, dear Mary," she said. "Walter has never required that I should adore him, but I am quite capable of doing so. You needn't try to make me have misgivings."

Cressage

Mrs. Goring shook her head. "When did all this happen?" she said.

"Yesterday, walking up from Thurston."

"Why didn't he come and tell me about it?"

"There was no time. He went off with Clare after tea, and had to rush back to dinner."

"With Clare?"

"Yes, I promised Clare she should have a talk with him."

"It is getting more lukewarm every minute! He asked you to marry him, and you didn't say no, and then he went off with Clare, and you allowed him!"

"He only asked me to think it over."

"As if he were engaging a cook!"

"I told you it was very rational."

"Even William was more energetic than that! After we had settled it all, he rushed off and brought me my water-proof and umbrella."

"Walter said quite enough for me; I have felt very happy ever since; I slept like a top."

"Worse and worse," said Mrs. Goring. "However, the thing's done. When does he expect an answer? Next Lady Day?"

"I shall see him before that," said Helen. "To-day, perhaps."

"Yes, and he will be much too refined to allude to it! Well, I shan't order my wedding present yet."

"I know papa will be delighted," said Helen; "my only fear is about Clare."

"Oh, Clare will buzz round you like a little gnat," said Mrs. Goring; "but, Helen dear, do get it settled! Don't let him go on philosophizing."

III

WHEN Helen returned to the Manor, the midday post had just arrived, and she saw there a letter, not unexpected, from Walter. She took it to her room and opened it.

MY DEAREST HELEN,—

How can I say what I have to say to you, after our talk of yesterday? What will you think of me, and how can I explain it? But it must be said at once. I am going to marry Clare. Does that seem to you very treacherous and brutal? I fear that it will; but how can I do otherwise? I have agreed with Clare that you must know all; you have a right to know. I was perfectly sincere in what I said to you. It seemed to me then like the natural and tranquil outcome of a long friendship.

But when I left you, I went with Clare to the gate-house; she began to talk, but completely broke down; she said she could not live without me, and that I had encouraged her to love me. I took her in my arms, and quite suddenly and irresistibly the feeling came upon me, like a blinding flash of lightning, that I loved her, and loved her as those who intend to marry ought to love and must love. I cannot describe it, for I have never felt anything like it before, nor, blind as I have been, did I ever guess that such a feeling existed in the world. It completely overcame me, but I thought of you, and though I felt that I was wronging you by thus turning to Clare, I should wrong you even more if I were to persuade you into marrying

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me, when neither of us feel as I now feel about Clare, and as she feels about me.

I told Clare what I had said to you; and she said that though she knew that I was very fond of you, she was certain that you did not feel as she felt. And I hope and indeed think that it is so. You have been constantly in my mind ever since I knew you. I have always desired to be with you, gone to meet you with happy anticipations, enjoyed every moment of your company. But this strange and transporting feeling has been absent—this passion, I suppose it must be called.

Of course I know I am very much to blame. But should I not be even more to blame if I dared to marry you, feeling as I do about Clare?

If you will see me, I will try to say more fully what I think, though I shall feel ashamed to meet you; and as for future arrangements and ways of life, I will settle whatever you wish. Clare blames herself for not having been more to you than she has been; but she tells me that some feeling of jealousy has stood in her way.

Try to forgive me if you can. I am miserable at the idea of losing your friendship; but do not blame me for saying what I did to you, because, as I say, the fact that I love Clare as I find that I do love her, is an entire surprise to me. I thought of her as a charming child—a younger sister; and now it is all changed.

Your loving

WALTER.

Helen read the letter, read it once again, and a sudden faintness seized her. She felt as if she had been swiftly and treacherously stabbed to the heart; anger, disdain, horror, humiliation, misery unutterable rushed in upon her, like a flock of evil birds of prey. But her anger was more

Cressage

fierce with Clare than with Walter; she thought of her sister as a scheming temptress, the incarnation of selfish unscrupulousness. Again the sense of faintness came upon her, and the room swam round her, with a loud rushing inside in her ears.

What was she to do? She could not speak to her father. The thought of Clare and of Miss Haden—whom she now suspected of having abetted Clare in her scheme—were like poison to her.

She rang, and her old maid came to her, who had been her own and Clare's nurse, and on seeing her, cried out in consternation, "You are looking ill, Miss Helen. You don't look fit to be about. What is the matter, dear?"

"Oh, Emmie, I'm not ill; but I have had a blow—a letter of bad news. I can't tell you about it. But, Emmie dear, see if you can send a message round to Mrs. Goring; say I must see her, if she can spare the time."

"I'll run round myself, Miss Helen; but you must take something first, dear—you're so pale and trembling."

Helen yielded, and presently Emmie trotted off in great alarm. Within a quarter of an hour, Mrs. Goring came swiftly in, with an exclamation of distress at the sight of Helen. She handed Mrs. Goring Walter's letter. Mrs. Goring read it with knitted brows and compressed lips. "We must have a little time to think over this," she said.

"But what am I to do?" said Helen. "I don't feel as if I could meet father or Clare with this in my mind."

"I don't wonder. Could you get as far as the Vicarage? I would put you to bed—that is where you ought to be—and send round here to say you were ill. That would give us a little time."

"You are a darling," said Helen. "Yes, I can get round to the Vicarage; it will do me good. We must just tell Emmie."

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Emmie was instructed to say nothing about Helen being ill, but merely that she had gone round to the Vicarage. They went down together and fortunately met no one. In five minutes they were at the Vicarage, where Helen went gladly and obediently to bed.

Mrs. Goring sent a note to Dr. Bowlby, and another note to Mr. Worsley to say that Helen had felt very faint, and that she had persuaded her to go to bed. The last brought Mr. Worsley round in much anxiety. "Yes, just look in to see her," said Mrs. Goring, "but I think she only wants rest and quiet; it was a sudden turn, and it was fortunate that she happened to be here. Inconvenience? It's a delight to me to have dear Helen here, well or ill. I am sure there's no need to be worried; she is only tired out—she has had an anxious time of late."

Mr. Worsley was obedient. He went in and gave Helen a kiss—told her to rest and get to sleep. "It will be my turn to come and read to you, dear; I am afraid you have been doing too much."

Mrs. Goring would not let her talk till Dr. Bowlby had seen her.

Helen fell into a troubled sleep, and woke later in the day in an access of misery insupportable.

Meanwhile, Clare, sent by Mr. Worsley, had called. Mrs. Goring received her with stern disdain. "The matter? You know perfectly well what is the matter."

"About Walter, I suppose," said Clare ingenuously.

"Yes, and about you. Clare, you have behaved very cruelly."

"I don't see that. Why should I not tell Walter what I felt? Of course, I knew there must be a row; but I should not have thought she would have minded very much."

Cressage

"Don't make me think worse of you than I do already. You seem to be absolutely heartless. I quite pity Walter."

"Well, he is the best judge of that," said Clare.

The news was broken to William, who, cheered by the assurance that Helen would be in bed for a day or two, was not much disturbed.

Late in the afternoon Dr. Bowlby arrived. Mrs. Goring told him in a vague way what had happened.

Dr. Bowlby did not seem in any way disconcerted.

"Are you never surprised at anything?" said Mrs. Goring.

"Yes, very often; but not now. There has been a good deal of powder lying about lately at the Manor. I have been expecting something of the sort to happen, and it's better to get it over."

"I think that Clare, and Walter in a less degree, have behaved atrociously."

"I'm not sure," said Dr. Bowlby. "I am sure Walter did not intend to do anything cruel—he is incapable of that—and Miss Clare is incapable of caring whether what she does is cruel or not."

"You blame *neither*?" said Mrs. Goring with her eyes aflame.

"I don't know enough to say. I blame people as much as they deserve. Blame is a very fortuitous thing. People often get no blame at all, when they deserve it; but they are still oftener blamed when they don't deserve it. There's a great deal of tinder about Miss Clare. There generally is when people are beautiful."

"But Helen has had a frightful shock."

"She is a healthy girl, Mrs. Goring. It is better for healthy people to have it all at once than to learn it by slow and miserable degrees."

"Ah, you are too much of a philosopher for me."

Cressage

Dr. Bowlby went to see Helen. He drew a chair to the bedside. "Yes, Mrs. Goring has told me all I need to know," he said in reply to an inquiring look. Then he went on: "Miss Helen, I want to speak very seriously. You will be quite within your rights to think and say that you have been treated abominably, and you will be able, if you choose, to make Walter entirely miserable—he might even withdraw from this engagement. I don't think you will make your sister miserable, unless you get Walter to withdraw. But this would be quite unworthy of you, and you know it as well as I do. You must behave as generously as you can. Of course it is a shock and a humiliation, and no one could blame you if you hit back; but it *would* be hitting back. You can turn Walter adrift, and you can make your father and sister miserable. But is it worth while? It would only be revenge, at best."

"Oh, I see that," said Helen, "but I can't feel it. Why should Walter have chosen the very day that he spoke to me to change his mind?"

"At all events he told you at once. It must have required some courage. He did not act with any secrecy, nor did he shelter himself behind your sister. It may have been cruel, but it has not been base. I do not say he has behaved well, though I do not quite know where I blame him. But it gives you a chance to behave well and generously. Miss Helen, I will say plainly to you that for me you are the most generous and the finest spirit I know. I do not ask you to behave thus for my sake—there is no reason why you should—but I do ask you to show yourself now to be what you are."

"But what am I to do?" said Helen.

"Very little—meet them frankly and generously, as few but you can. Let me say one thing about Walter. I have long known that he had stored up in him a capacity for

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passion. He loves and honours you above all others; and if you can keep him in your heart, he will be a true friend to you as long as you live—and you will be able to help him greatly, because he will need help. Miss Clare may be his wife, but she cannot be his friend. But something in her has touched the spring of this latent passion, and though he might have delayed matters and dallied with the situation, I doubt if he could have overcome it. You will not collapse under this strain. You are too strong, too good. Rest here a day or two and then return home, and meet things as they come.”

“Ought I to see Walter?”

“Yes, as soon as you can. Don’t make any plans or promises. You will not break down.”

Helen murmured her thanks.

“I would do anything in the world to save you from trouble, Miss Helen. But no one can bear our burdens, and you will bear this nobly.” He took the hand she held out to him, kissed it, nodded and smiled at her, and went away.

“How do you find her?” said Mrs. Goring.

“She has had a shock, but she will soon get over it. You will see, she will behave splendidly.”

“And is no one to be punished?”

“Oh, that will look after itself. Get her to see Walter as soon as possible. I am not sure that I am not more anxious about him.”

IV

TO see that a course of action is the best, most high-minded and wisest, is not necessarily the same thing as wanting to adopt it. All the lesser human elements stung and goaded Helen. Her position was so undignified. She was regarded by the two culprits as so negligible, as useful but not necessary, and could be quietly shelved if something more attractive came in sight. She had an overwhelming desire to assert herself, to scatter her enemies; she had the subtle temptation of wondering whether it was good for people to act shamelessly and heartlessly, and go unpunished. She confessed her weakness penitently to Mrs. Goring, who admitted that she had the right to retaliate. "But at a moment like this," said Mrs. Goring, "I doubt if it is wise to act from exalted motives; it is better to face the practical side of the question. You can no doubt prevent Walter from marrying Clare, if you say what you may well feel; but you can't accept Walter on those terms, if indeed, after what he has done, on *any* terms."

"But what should I do?" said Helen.

"If I were in your place, I should see Walter, and say as little as possible to either him or Clare. That they should speculate as to what you may be feeling is the best way of making them see what they have done; but this is a kind of diplomacy, and one person's diplomacy doesn't suit another. If William and I have a difference, I embarrass him most by simply holding my tongue."

Cressage

"It wouldn't amuse me to be diplomatic," said Helen. "What I really care about is to know if it is spontaneous, or if Walter has been entrapped."

"I don't think Clare is crafty," said Mrs. Goring. "She is simply incapable of seeing anyone's point of view but her own."

"I think I shall see Walter and trust to the impulse of the moment," said Helen. "Quite apart from being very fond of Walter, I have always admired him. He has always done unpleasant things with a good grace; there never seemed anything petty about him."

"He is not petty in small things," said Mrs. Goring; "but one can be petty in big things."

"The sooner I see him the better," said Helen; "but I don't feel that I can sit arguing with him indoors. There really is nothing amiss with me. Could he come the day after to-morrow, and go a little walk with me, do you think?"

"I think you ought to have a little longer rest and quiet."

"Oh no," said Helen. "I don't want rest; I am perfectly well. If I am left reflecting in bed, I shall take leave of my senses."

"Yes, I think you are right!"

Helen wrote:

"DEAREST WALTER,—

Your letter surprised me very much. I don't think I fully understand it all. I am here at the Vicarage. Could you come up on Wednesday after lunch and go for a walk with me?

Your loving

HELEN.

Cressage

Mrs. Goring approved. "I am thankful you don't alter your signature, dear," she said. "That is the meanest form of revenge."

The next day passed wearily enough. Helen begged Mrs. Goring not to let Dr. Bowlby come. "I am inclined to confess to him," she said, "and I think that is rather weakening."

Walter arrived at the Vicarage the following day in a painful state of agitation. Mrs. Goring received him with obvious coldness. He asked about Helen. "I think you will find her much as usual," Mrs. Goring said.

"I suppose you know all about it?"

"Quite as much as I want to; and you won't expect an old friend to abstain from comment. I simply can't believe it of you, Walter. I can't think of anything that would have distressed your mother more; and I think it would have wounded your father in the one point where he was vulnerable—his pride."

"I can't expect you to understand," said Walter, very pale. "Does Helen feel as you do?"

"Helen has behaved better than I should have thought it possible for anyone to behave. She is capable of any generosity, but I am not, and it is just as well that you should know how it strikes an ordinary middle-class woman."

While Walter stood regarding her in silence, Helen came quickly into the room, pale and worn-looking, but apparently composed. Walter thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. She smiled at him in silence, and then said, "Shall we go? Let us go up on to the downs again." They crossed the garden, and entered the wood-path. Neither knew how to break the silence.

"What can you think of me, Helen?" said Walter at last.

Cressage

"I don't know yet," said Helen. "You must tell me what there is to tell."

"A fortnight ago," said Walter, "if you had asked me what I felt about Clare, I should have said she was charming as a child can be charming; but when I left you the other afternoon, meaning to tell her what I had said to you, I found she had turned into a woman. I began to tell her about ourselves, but she would not hear me, and I must not tell you what she said, but I understood that she loved me."

"Better than I did?" said Helen.

"In a different way; and then there came over me that feeling of which I wrote to you. It was like a sudden wave bearing me away."

"I could have given you my best, Walter; I was always ready to do that."

"I know," said Walter; "but should we have been happy? Helen, I am in your hands. If you feel that I am bound to you, I will fulfil my promise. But I cannot pretend that I do not love Clare; and if you do not take me, I shall marry no one but Clare."

Helen turned and looked at him; but he cast his eyes down and would not meet her gaze.

"You are quite free, dear Walter. You asked me for my friendship, and you gave me your own friendship—the best gift I ever had. I am not ungrateful . . . and I don't want you to be unhappy."

"Helen, you won't turn away from me altogether? I love and honour you with all my heart; but there is a kind of love, not the best kind perhaps, which I somehow could not give you, and which I did not think you could give me. I thought our friendship would be enough to build our life upon; but it is not enough, God forgive me!"

Cressage

His eyes filled with tears; and there came over Helen a sense of pity such as she could not have believed possible that she could have felt for anyone.

"Walter," she said, "I understand. I think you must obey that other love, and we will not cease to be friends. Don't let us speak any more of it at all. If I were to speak, I might only say what would hurt us both. So let us put it all away and never return to it again."

"But, Helen dearest," said Walter, "I must say to you how miserable it has made me to have to hurt you, the best . . ."

But Helen put her arm through his, and laid her other hand lightly on his lips. "I will not hear a word, Walter," she said. "Of course I know you would not have done anything to distress me on purpose—the intention is what matters."

They walked on slowly in silence, and were presently clear of the wood—the hill rose before them.

"Walter," said Helen, "we will not go to the hill—and indeed I am tired, and must think of returning; to go there was a cruel thought of mine—a little nasty touch of revenge. Some future day we will go there again, when we have seen how we can keep our promises."

They could see the roofs of the Manor from where they stood. "There is one thing for which I am entirely thankful," Helen said, "that you will soon be at home there again; but I must hold my tongue—I won't talk about this, and I can't talk about anything else."

The bare woods were silent all about them, not yet touched by the secret flush of the spring. Above the wood, the steep bare hills rose into the clear and chilly sky. The rich smell of the dying leaves came aromatically out of the wood; and Helen thought that the wintry fields among

Cressage

and above the dark shadowy woodland were more beautiful in their spare and delicate tints than when flushed with summer colour. She was glad that the beauty of it could come into her mind. But Walter paced beside her, heavily and disconsolately, and she at last spoke.

"Walter, there is one thing that you must promise me, that you will not feel like *this* about it."

"I can't do otherwise, dear Helen. The finer that you show yourself to be, the worse I feel. If you had reproached me, if you had said half the bitter things you might have said, I should have felt it less."

"Hush, hush," said Helen. "You tempt me to speak, and I won't be tempted."

It was a relief to both of them when they regained the garden. Mrs. Goring was waiting for them at the door. She put an arm round Helen, and held out a disengaged hand to Walter, hardly looking at him.

"I won't detain you, Walter," she said.

"Oh, Mary don't talk like that," said Helen. "Walter and I have settled it all, and not another word must be spoken;" and she stepped up to Walter, who stood mute and irresolute, flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him. "Good night, dear, dear Walter," she said. They entered the house together and Walter strode silently away.

V

THE return to the Manor was a sore trial to Helen. She felt as if the one and only thing in the world that she could have acquiesced in was to leave home and bury herself far in the depths of the country, or in some foreign land where there should be nothing to remind her of her sorrows. Moreover, she had thought that the first step once taken, and her black thoughts once put undermost, the victory was won. She did not know that Satan, once repulsed, brings up his dark battalions in dense order to the second or third assault. She returned; but there was much in her room to remind her of Walter—his photograph, the books he had given her, the packets of his letters. Apart from the affront, the very basis of her life seemed undermined. And then there was Clare, with an air of meek triumph, and Miss Haden demurely rejoicing over the spoils of victory. The talk that must come with Clare, it was that which mattered most. She knew well the line that Clare would take: "Well, you had your chance, and as you did not take it, why should not someone else have a chance too?"

Of course, if all had come about naturally, Walter would have been daily at the Manor, probably staying there; but as it was, there was a general sense of diplomacy and secrecy; Clare often went off by herself in the car, morning or evening, and Helen knew only too well that she went to meet Walter.

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She had arranged with Walter that she might tell Mr. Worsley, and that nothing need be said to him of any breach of faith. She determined that this should not be delayed, and on his second day at home, she went to her father in his study after tea.

"Papa, I have something to tell you—I am charged to tell you—you will have your wish partly, but not altogether: Clare is going to marry Walter."

Mr. Worsley dropped his pen, and sat looking at her inquiringly. "My dear Helen, there must be some mistake. Walter has said nothing to me of this."

"He asked me to tell you, papa."

"He should have told me himself; and if it *is* so, why does he not come here? It is all very strange; I was never so astonished in my life."

"The reason why he does not come here," said poor Helen, trying to remain tranquil and cheerful, "is perhaps because of me. He has not been sure how I should like it; I think that is natural."

"I thought you and he were better friends than ever; I hoped that my wishes were coming true. Helen, dear, there is something strange in all this. Walter is a serious man with intellectual tastes, and Clare is a mere child. I cannot imagine what they have in common."

"Perhaps that is the very reason—that he wants something more young and sprightly."

"Helen, I have a feeling that you have been used badly in all this. A young man has no right, it seems to me, to claim so much friendship and attention from a girl unless he has more definite intentions. Did it not surprise you very much?"

"I knew he was very fond of Clare. I understand it all perfectly."

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"Still, it seems strange that he has said nothing to me about it. There is a regular course of proceeding in these matters—or used to be. It seems hardly—what shall I say?—hardly respectful."

"I think these things are done differently nowadays, papa."

"It seems so; but do not stand, dear." She was standing beside him. "Please sit down; we must have a talk about this. It involves a change in all my arrangements. Supposing this is true—and I take your word for it—it must affect all my dispositions; do you see that, Helen?"

"I don't quite understand what you mean."

"My idea had been that the estate should be settled upon Walter and you. I had arranged it so; but now I should have to settle it on Walter and Clare."

"Yes, of course; the point is that Walter should have it."

"If I were to leave it to them, they must have money to keep it up," continued Mr. Worsley, "and the fortune which I had destined for you would be much diminished."

"I should not mind that, papa."

"Yes, but I mind it. This is all very discomposing. You are just the wife for Walter; but Clare has no sense of responsibility. I cannot imagine her being of any use or help to him."

"People don't marry for those reasons."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Worsley, "but some of the best marriages I know have been based on such reasons. I must consider everything very carefully. I should not like it to appear that you had been treated unjustly. That would arouse much comment. It would be held that I had some reason for being displeased with you."

"But *I* should never think so, papa."

"It is a most difficult question altogether. You will forgive me if I say that this is more a question for me than for you. But in any case, I think that Walter should speak to me on the subject."

"I will tell him, papa."

She was glad to be able to escape. Mr. Worsley was evidently desirous of reconsidering the question of settlements. This, Helen was relieved to think, would keep him from indulging in any inconvenient conjectures. But the whole thing filled her with weariness. Life seemed to be to her nothing but a journey between high walls which hemmed her in, and with a dark sky overhead. She told Walter what her father had said, and she determined as soon as possible to talk the matter out with Clare. The situation must be accepted as it was, not kept a half-secret.

That night, when they had all retired to bed, she tapped at the door of Clare's room, a long panelled place, the best bedroom in the house, which Clare had petitioned for when they moved to the Manor, that it might serve her as a sitting-room as well. It contained a great old bed with carved pilasters and a frieze of ornament; and Clare had conveyed thither certain pieces of furniture from other rooms which took her fancy, so that it had an air of luxury which no other room equalled.

There were two candles burning on the dressing-table, and Clare, wrapped in a startling kimono of Japanese silk, was sitting in an arm-chair in front of a fire of logs on the deep-arched hearth, doing nothing, and, as Helen realized on entering the room, a vision of extraordinary beauty. Clare looked up surprised and half irritably.

"We must get a talk about all this, Clare," Helen said, standing beside the fire and looking down on her sister. "I seem hardly ever to see you."

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Clare gave her a little smile. "Yes, perhaps we had better get it over," she said. "Do sit down, Helen; I hate being talked to by someone standing up—I feel as if I were being lectured."

Helen sat down in a big carved chair of oak, which stood beside the fire in the shadow.

"Now then," said Clare, "you can do your worst. I suppose you are very angry with me?"

"No, I don't think I am that. Of course it was a great surprise."

"Ah, you were surprised?" said Clare. "But I don't mean to be disagreeable about it, because I think you have something to complain of, and you might before now have made things very uncomfortable. Indeed, I can't think why you haven't. If it had been the other way round, I should not have let you down so easily. But I suppose you have been finding reasons. You always enjoy doing that, you know. I am not sure you ought not to be grateful to me for setting you to work."

"Don't try to make me angry, Clare. I want to try to get things straight."

"I don't want to make you angry at all, Helen. I can't *admire* you about this, because it seems spiritless to take such a thing sitting down; but I am really grateful to you for not showing fight. But you know, Helen, it wouldn't have done at all. I don't think you know what it is to be really fond of anyone, as I am of Walter. I sit and think of him for hours together; and when I am with him—well, I won't say what I feel then. But I saw Walter and you feeling more and more bound to make a match of it, I felt it would not do."

"Clare, you seem determined to provoke me. How do you know I didn't 'show fight,' as you call it?"

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"Fight with whom?" said Clare flippantly.

"With myself, of course. Is that a thing you don't understand? Can't you see what I am losing, and all that this has meant to me—a long friendship, growing gradually into something better still? And then just when it has come to me, this happiness, it is gone in a moment. And now, not content with having taken it from me, you taunt me with being spiritless. Because I am miserable, I don't therefore want Walter, I don't want even you, to be unhappy; a word from me to Walter might not have brought him back to me, but it would have made him turn from you for ever. Because you can't conceive of not wanting to be revenged on anyone who has done you a wrong, you think I have just effaced myself and gone meekly away. I did not say a word of blame to you, and so you turn on me and scratch me like a cat. It is as if I had saved you from drowning, and you had then pushed me out of the boat because you were afraid that it would not hold two comfortably."

Clare became deadly pale, and winced and whimpered under the onslaught. "You are not going to be so cruel as to spoil it all now, Helen?"

"Of course not. You seem to think me the meanest and basest person alive."

"I don't think that, Helen—only I was so afraid that things would go wrong—and I am afraid of you now, Helen, when you look like that. Have you ever looked at Walter like that?"

"I am ashamed of having had to explain things to you," said Helen, beginning to feel repentant. "But you must explain one thing that you said. You said you saw it would never do? Why not?"

Clare was rapidly recovering her serenity. "Why,

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because you may be Walter's best friend, but you are too much like him. He wants a change—all men do. He wants someone to kiss and tease and pet. He might worship you like a kind of statue, but no one would ever want to pull you about."

Helen's spirit sickened within her. This was to be Walter's best and dearest possession, the light of his life. Was this really the kind of thing that men wanted?

"You may be right, Clare. And we had better never speak of this again. I don't mean to interfere with either Walter or you. I would like you to think differently about it all, but I won't try to persuade you."

"I'm sure I don't want to speak of it again," said Clare. "But I see you have behaved very decently, and I am sorry if I was unfair, though I think you might have explained it to me a little less unkindly."

"I'm sorry for that," said Helen, relenting. She got up and knelt by Clare, and put an arm round her, wondering at the extraordinary beauty and fragrance of her little sister. "We will try and begin again, dear; we were good friends once."

"Never," said Clare, "that I can remember. I daresay I am a horrid little wretch, but I used to feel you were always rather down on me; and then everyone was polite and respectful to you, and I was always stuck in the background. I had to assert myself somehow; and then—I am going to say this straight out—I envied you your friendship with Walter, who always seemed to me the most splendid person in the world, and almost hated you for taking it all so easily, and not being more proud of it. And then I found that Walter would make friends with me, and I saw what he wanted, and you didn't. I can't pretend to be sorry, but I'm sorry for you in a way, because people can't

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get near you. They admire you, they listen to you, but they don't want *you*; and if you want a man for your own, he has got to want you for his own."

Helen did her best to smile. "My wise little sister!" she said. "Where did you learn all this?"

"Why, it stares us in the face all the time," said Clare. "But clever people like you miss seeing it. Walter very nearly did, but I taught him."

Helen bent down and kissed her, and Clare returned her kiss almost eagerly. "I shall try to be nicer, Helen. Don't think too badly of me. You have seen all the worst of me; there is nothing worse behind."

Walter came the next day and had a long conference with Mr. Worsley. They came together in to tea. Clare appeared, very quiet and demure. She had had a talk with her father in which, though he did not disguise his pleasure, he said a few words which sank into her mind. "I don't mean to make any inquiries," he said, "and Helen has never said a word to me; but I do not feel sure that you have not in some ways taken advantage of her; and if she were to say so herself, I should feel very much vexed. I don't feel sure that you are taking this seriously. You will have a very good position in the County when you are married, and I hope you will be worthy of it."

After tea, Helen went to her room. She was troubled by the sight of Walter. He looked woefully strained and worn. But a few minutes later he knocked at her door. "May I come in?" he said. "Clare sent me. She thinks you have behaved very kindly to her, and she said, 'Helen must have her share.'" Walter smiled wanly.

Cressage

Helen made him sit down by the fire, and came and sat on a low stool beside him. "You look very sad, Walter dear," she said. "I wish I could prevent that! Yes, I had a curious talk with Clare. I got very angry at something she said, but I am not sorry, for she turned out her inmost mind before me in a way she has never done before. She loves you very much, Walter, and you will be able to build up whatever you want on that."

Walter looked at her. "Helen," he said, "I am utterly miserable—not about Clare, because she makes me forget everything. But the more I hear and see, the more basely I feel I have behaved to you; and if I thought I should lose your affection and trust, I should go mad. But how can you give me either? It all seems like a strange enchantment. I feel as if I had been bewitched, as if I were two people and not one. Sometimes I feel that in losing you, I have lost everything; for in spite of everything, I do care for you from the bottom of my soul, and feel that you are nearer to me even than Clare herself. And then again I wonder if we should have been happy, whether I could ever have given you what every woman wants—a passion which isn't a quiet, temperate, thoughtful thing at all, but something violent, and in a way almost shocking. Of course I know that I did it all hurriedly and horribly, but if it had waited?" He looked up at her miserably, anxiously intertwining his hands.

"No, Walter," Helen said. "You *haven't* done wrong; I don't feel that. What Clare said to me has given me a different feeling about it all. I have no grievance. Something much bigger and stronger than you or I has intervened. I shall pick up the threads of my life again. But I don't want to lose you, Walter. We are, I think, knit together in some strange way, but it isn't the way of love and

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marriage. Can't we put that side of it away, and continue to be to each other what we have been?"

For answer he leant forwards, took her hands in his, and kissed them again and again. "Oh, Helen dearest," he said, but could say no more.

They sat in silence, holding hands like two children.

"But this won't keep you back from loving another man, Helen," he said, "with the kind of love you could not give to me? It must not spoil your life."

"We must leave that, Walter. No, it is not going to spoil my life, it is going to make it richer; you are going to make both Clare and me richer, in different ways. You and I, Walter, needed to be torn apart. It is going to save and free us both. Nothing will ever separate us from each other for ever."

VI

THERE seemed little reason for any long delay in Walter's wedding. Mr. Worsley alone seemed to think that decorum demanded a lengthy engagement. But Mrs. Goring, requisitioned by Helen, had a talk with him, in which Mr. Worsley expressed the opinion that Clare took a hardly serious enough view of her responsibilities to assume the august name of Mrs. Garnet, of Cressage Garnet. But Mrs. Goring rapidly disposed of his anxieties. She saw that the longer Clare remained engaged, the flightier she would become; "and then," she added, "what with Walter away at Oxford, you will have those insupportable young men from Thurston hovering round her again, and who knows . . ."

"You need say no more," said Mr. Worsley hurriedly. "I defer to a woman's judgment in these matters."

The decision was a great relief to Helen, and it was settled that Clare should be married in March. A great fuss was made about clothes, and there were visits to Oxford to be made to look at houses; for Walter entirely declined Mr. Worsley's suggestion that he should give up "professional" work and begin his reign at the Manor, which was to be settled upon Clare. Mr. Worsley said that he himself with Helen would retire to the Thurston house; but Walter was not to be moved, and Clare, who never much cared for the solemn dignity of the Manor, was very favourably disposed to Oxford.

Cressage

During those months, Helen and Clare became close companions, and Helen found Clare relying on her at every turn; and though she could not say that she found Clare particularly conscious of her coming responsibilities, she came to recognize in her a tough determination to be useful to Walter, and a disposition to learn something about household management which she had hitherto considered beneath her notice.

But as the time drew near, Helen became troubled about the future. She was sitting with Mrs. Goring one day at the Vicarage, and said, "Mary, what am I to do when Clare is married? I don't like to leave papa, but Walter and Clare will be spending nearly half the year at the Manor, and it seems to me I shall be in a very difficult position. I doubt if Clare, however good her intentions may be, will care about my seeing much of Walter; and I have a feeling that Walter will not acquiesce in being at the Manor without someone to talk to him about his interests. I don't think it will matter at Oxford, where he will find plenty of companionship."

"I had thought of that myself," said Mrs. Goring, "and I agree that it is rather courting disaster."

"I think it might be better if Walter gave up his Oxford work and allowed papa and myself to retire to Thurston. But then again, I can't quite fancy Walter and Clare settling down all alone at the Manor."

"Have you any plan of your own, Helen?"

"I thought I might get some work in town; but then I have no useful accomplishments. I suppose, however, I might find some unpaid work?"

"I don't think you can leave your father all alone. Can't you leave it for the present? Walter and Clare will be

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going off for their honeymoon; and they really will be very little at the Manor till June."

"Yes, I must leave it. But, Mary, I am rather afraid of these months. I seem to be living in a great bustle just now, but it is all on the surface; and I have a feeling every now and then that there is a serious strife going on within me, deep down out of reach, and as if it might come to the surface when I am less busy. I seem to be walking in a vain shadow. And then again, Mary, there is something worse; Walter's misery, and the sight of him, seems to be bringing me to the point of being dangerously fond of him. It is the touch of weakness about him that makes the change. When all was well, there seemed nothing I could give him; and now there seems to be so much. I don't say that I feel like that yet, but I don't trust myself; and if he came here in the summer, and if it proved that Clare can't give him the sort of companionship he needs,—well, I think there might be something like a tragedy."

Mrs. Goring sat musing. "Yes," she said, "it is no good putting one's hand into the fire, unless one means to burn it off."

The day drew near at last. Walter had written regularly to Helen; but the zest and sparkle of his letters had vanished, and she felt as though he had grown curiously remote. But the greatest difficulty of all that she had to face, was that just before the wedding, Clare was seized with a sort of terror, which took the form of thinking that she would not know what to talk to Walter about.

"But you never have had any difficulty before?"

"No; but then the fun was that nobody knew what was going on—it was stolen fruit."

"Oh, you won't have the smallest trouble about that."

Cressage

"I wish you could come with us, Helen, when we go away."

"The Miss Worsleys and their husband? That would hardly do."

"If Walter shows any signs of being bored, I shall destroy myself. I ought to have spent all these weeks in solid reading."

"Well, Clare, I have been a good deal with Walter, and *we* never talked about solid things."

"What did you talk about?"

"Anything that turned up. You will find that Walter will do all the talking."

"But I don't know what I shall do without you, Helen. Walter won't understand—men never do—and there will be no one to turn to."

"I'll write to you, Clare; I will send you lists of possible subjects."

"Yes, Helen, do! But I wish I didn't feel so queer."

"It will be all right the moment you set eyes on Walter."

Walter arrived from Oxford the day before the wedding. He dined at the Manor, and Helen was glad to find him looking well and happy. They had only a few words of talk. The wedding was a quiet one, in the little old church; and an hour or two later Helen had said good-bye to the wedded pair, the guests departed; and then, after persuading her father to rest, she went out for a solitary walk.

The aconites were beginning to show their sturdy heads in the borders of the little court, and the snowdrops which Helen disliked for their scentless and waxen stolidity, were pushing up. The woodlands had a purple flush about them, and the hedge-row banks were full of climbing fronds and sprays. A deep dejection, which Helen tried to think

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was merely a reaction after the bustle, came down on her. But the last sight of Clare, full of radiant pride, together with a wondering, half-pitying look in Walter's face, which she could not quite interpret, haunted her.

But she herself felt face to face with the blankness of life. It seemed to her that she had missed a great chance of happiness—and now? Was it as Clare had said—the words had rankled in her mind—that she was too serious, too fastidious, too heavy in hand? She hated that view of herself; and yet the blandishments, which Clare had prided herself for using, seemed to have something coarse and impure about them, needing to be purified by an intense and fiery consent of the soul. Helen longed with all her heart for something to cling to and embrace, not the tepid service she could give her father, nor the tame advice she could administer to second-rate people: the thought of children clinging to her, depending on her, smiling at her, falling to sleep in her embrace stung and tortured her. It was life she wanted, and the labour and suffering which life must bring with it, so dreary if faced alone, so stimulating if shared with one who loved her. Was she to be kept away from all this by having a thin, cold, fastidious standard of her own, intervening like a screen of ice between her and the fire of life? The long bleak years stretched ahead of her—and a little more concession, a little touch of pose, might have won her what her careless and warm-blooded sister had swept by a touch from her grasp.

It seemed an agony too great to be spoken of. She could not be for ever pouring out her sick necessities before Mary Goring, who for all her love could give her no comfort—Religion? Could she take up her cross, could she be content to be pierced and crucified upon the dreary duty she could offer? No, she felt that this would be a mere

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delusion, a conscious hypocrisy; and when she reached the Manor, and went in under the gate-house, it seemed to her that she had sunk deep in the mire—that it had closed over her head, and that her feet were still struggling in vain to touch some secure standing ground.

VII

WITHIN a few days it seemed to Helen that she had descended into hell. An agonizing melancholy seized upon her. She woke at an early hour, her heart beating fast, and in these protracted reveries, she began to dissect her whole life, and to trace her disasters backwards from cause to cause. It appeared to her that she had by her own fault forfeited the love of all those about her, and that her whole life had been planned on selfish lines, entirely for her own satisfaction. She took to rising early and going out, but the evil spirit pursued her, whispering at her ear. All day long the mood recurred. She became exhausted by the least effort, incapable of decision, incapable of completing the smallest task. She would sit for an hour over a simple note, unable to find words. She would often fall asleep out of sheer weariness for a few moments in her chair, and her waking on these occasions seemed the signal for a fresh assault of torment.

She managed at first to keep up appearances, but this gradually failed her. Then she grew thin and wasted and unable to endure the smallest exertion. Her father did not seem to notice her malaise, and this was of the nature of comfort, for of all things she least desired any show of sympathy.

Mrs. Goring, however, was much alarmed. She spoke to Helen about it, but could get very little out of her. "Yes, she was very miserable and it was all her own fault."

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"But it is *not* your fault, Helen! In all this wretched business you are the only person who has behaved consistently well."

"It goes back much farther than that, Mary. My whole life has been lived on the wrong lines."

"I wish you would see the doctor; I can't help thinking you want a change."

"There is nothing the matter with my body, Mary—at least it does not begin there."

Walter wrote to Mrs. Goring to ask if there was anything the matter. He and Clare hardly heard from Helen, and her letters told them nothing; the very handwriting, Walter said, was changed.

Mrs. Goring at last consulted Dr. Bowlby. "Yes," he said, "I know that Miss Helen is ill—it has been coming on for some time—she has been subjected to too great a strain."

"What can be done? I never saw anyone so utterly changed."

"Very little, I fear. Medicines are of little or no use. If there were anything which she would like to do, it might help her."

"But that is just it—she seems to have lost all her interest. It seems to me as if she might almost go out of her mind."

"She won't do that; it isn't a mental malady at all, though she probably thinks it is. You need not be anxious: it is only a question of waiting. The best you can do for her is to give her your company, and take as little notice as possible."

But time passed and Helen got no better. At last she consented to see Dr. Bowlby.

Dr. Bowlby found her sitting in her room with papers

before her, trying to do some accounts. She gave him a pathetic smile. "Mrs. Goring wanted me to see you," she said, "but it is of no use. I don't think I am ill, and I have nothing to tell you."

"Shall I tell you your symptoms?" said Dr. Bowlby. He ran through the physical sensations, and then said, "And you think that your faults and sins have somehow brought you to this, and that your selfishness and hardness is the cause."

"Mrs. Goring must have repeated my words to you."

"Not a word, Miss Helen! These are the things which everyone who is similarly afflicted—and it is not very uncommon—says. The more conscientious and affectionate they have been, the blacker they think themselves. Can't you regard these unhappy thoughts just as symptoms? I heard almost exactly the same story from a patient yesterday."

"But there seems no way out. My fancies may be unreal, but I cannot throw them off."

"They will disappear of themselves. It is simply a question of waiting. We doctors know the malady quite well, but cannot get directly at it. It is like listening at a closed door and hearing someone groaning within."

"But how can a mere illness so affect one's mind?"

"Miss Helen, you know that you direct your actions and thoughts with different parts of your brain. The part of your brain that reflects, and feels emotion, and remembers, is tired out. Nature is trying to rest it; and the best way you can help the cure is by trying not to think of anything, either sad or glad. We probably use our emotions too much nowadays. The more purely mechanical things you can do the better. I pledge you my word that you will get *perfectly* well."

"But meanwhile," said Helen, looking at him with a

sort of terror, "my only desire is to die and to fade away out of a life which one can make such a mess of."

"You will soon take up your life again, and you will be more interested than ever. Is there anything you would like to do—to go away for a change?"

"No, that would be worse than anything. My real dread is the return of Walter and Clare."

"Miss Helen, I think that it is a pity, for people in your condition, to avoid quite unavoidable duties, though they should spare themselves whatever they can avoid. When do they come back?"

"In a fortnight from now."

"Very well; I will see you again in good time—when-ever you like—and if you feel you really cannot face it, I will have something arranged. So you need not worry over that. Have I done you any good?"

"A little," said Helen; "I don't feel quite such an out-cast as I did, or quite so much alone in my miseries."

"I can come to you at once and at any time if you want me. But I do not think you will. You have great self-control. Some people in this state sit and cry all day."

He said good-bye. Helen was thankful that he had made no appeal to her emotions. His big tousled head, his kind eyes, the look he bent upon her were all comforting. But an hour after he was gone, she was as miserable as ever.

Mrs. Goring was constantly with her in these days; but there were times when she was left to her own devices, and then she walked by herself. She could not bear the woods; they seemed to be full of presences regarding her with dull, disdainful eyes; there were voices far off, faintly heard, not speaking to her but to each other.

But if she made her way through the pastures above the

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house, there was a place which had always had an attraction for her; at some time or other, a dam of stones and earth had been built across the stream that flowed down the valley, forming a pool of some size. The dam was now all grass-grown and covered with little thorn-bushes, and round the pool was a fringe of sedge and bulrush, while a thorn-thicket had been planted all round the upper part of the pool. No sedge grew on the dam, and from the little pathway across, you could stand beside a dilapidated sluice, where the stream flowed away downwards in a narrow channel. Here the water was very deep and clear. In summer hours it was delicious to look down into the pool, and on hot days she had sat there with a book, and seen the birds come out of the wood to drink and bathe. But now the place began to have a different attraction. How easy it would be, she thought, to slip down into the depth and let the waters cover her: she had read in some book that it was easy to drown, if you did not struggle to save yourself, but breathed the water in. A few seconds, and one would be unconscious; a few more minutes, and one would be parted for ever from a world where it was so easy to miss one's way, to bring unhappiness upon oneself and all about one. No one would grieve for her; she had alienated all her dearest by her selfish coldness. Surely, if the worst came to the worst, she could have the courage to do that, and to escape.

She was not exactly tempted to act so. But it always presented itself to her as a way of possible escape. She never thought of self-destruction as wicked. The Power behind the world, whatever it was, who summoned men and creatures to die so constantly and for such small reasons, little carelessnesses, tiny accidents, did not, she thought, regard death very seriously. Perhaps indeed it was a reward

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rather than a punishment. In all this she had no sense of self-pity; she felt she might have made a fine thing out of her life, if she had seized her chances; but she had just drifted on. This, at least, would be decisive. And if God or Nature, she hardly knew which, was too hard upon her, and made her path too hard to tread, she surely had the right to go. *Meek* submission was never a duty. Helen hated meekness. When she had submitted, it had always been a vigorous fight against an unruly will.

Here then she often went. In the wintry weather the dry sedge stood rustling about the pool, and sometimes there were little rafts of ice about their stems; but by the sluice the water slept black and deep: this way she would go, if she had to go.

Walter and Clare were to arrive upon a Saturday, and it was now the Monday before. Helen had awakened that morning to an anguish intolerable; it was almost as if she could smell or taste the pain of her mind. The hours crept past with a sickening slowness, but she could do nothing at all. She took up one thing after another, and laid them down. She felt for once that she ought not to be alone, but found Mrs. Goring out, and no one knew where she had gone. Mr. Goring came to speak to her. "I am sorry to hear you are not well, Miss Helen," he said, "and indeed you do not seem well. But these times of illness can be strangely blest to one, if one searches the heart for its secrets, and looks negligences and ignorances in the face."

"Oh, Mr. Goring," said Helen, "I have done that till there seems nothing left but negligence."

"Ah," said Mr. Goring, "but it is at seasons like this that one can pierce through to one's secret sins—the sins, that is, that are hidden even from oneself. A sad mood

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may exaggerate, but the soul is on the right track. We are shapen in wickedness, even the best of us; and not till we have learnt our utter worthlessness can we arise, and go forward."

Helen's heart sickened within her. "I can't believe that, Mr. Goring. I don't think God wants to crush us into a miserable helplessness; He wants us to live with as much joy and eagerness as we can."

"That is not my experience," said Mr. Goring in hollow tones. "We cannot lay hands on joy; we must purchase it by tears and blood."

Helen could bear no more. She was filled with a sense of angry revolt, and hastened away. All of a sudden her anger died down, and she was filled with a shuddering horror of the ugliness and blackness of the world. She looked up; she was close upon the pool. The bleak air came shivering across the hill and the water seemed to shudder at its touch; a greyness hung over the long hill and the wood beneath. An intense desire for death, for a cessation of all the weary explanation and excuses, of the affections that could not claim what they desired, the unthanked duty that had to be so reluctantly rendered—death as the final simplification seemed to beckon her. She stood motionless and pale, gazing at the water.

As she stood, a man turned the corner of the thorn-thicket, walking slowly and unconcernedly, and came towards her. She saw that it was Dr. Bowlby. He raised his hat, and came quietly on. He approached her across the dam, and said, "You will be surprised to see me here, Miss Helen? I went to the Manor to see you, found you gone, chased you to the Vicarage, and then, just by chance, old Paul Carter told me he had seen you take the field-path—so I followed you. I am free this afternoon,

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and thought we might perhaps have a stroll; it is easier to talk of things in the open air, don't you think?"

Helen looked at him with fixed gaze, and then said, "Dr. Bowlby, you don't know *why* I am here. I know I ought to have told you, but it seemed like giving away my only comfort. I come here often that I may think how easy it would be to take my life."

Dr. Bowlby smiled. "You would never do it, Miss Helen! I haven't the least anxiety. There are some people who, when things go wrong, fly running to death—others whom no extremity of pain, either of mind or body, would persuade to it. You are one of the latter—your vitality is too strong. If you threw yourself in there, you would be out again in half a minute, and you would find it difficult on reaching home to explain why you were so wet. Please tell me if you suffer from any of these fancies. They are sure to come, but they are not dangerous to you."

"I thought you would think me wicked."

"Miss Helen, whatever you told me, I should not think that. I see nothing wicked, in any case, about frank suicide; it sometimes shows great weakness, great disregard of causing unhappiness—sometimes, I regret to say, great malignity. Then it is wicked, perhaps. But that you should desire to be dead is natural enough—it is not unusual."

"You won't think it necessary to have me watched and guarded?"

Dr. Bowlby laughed. "No, certainly not. You are perfectly safe. But I wouldn't go out alone if I were you—that is often a little depressing, though when one is well and happy, it is the most delicious thing in the world. Why don't you get some of your old Thurston friends to walk with you, who will need no entertaining? Yes, I know it all seems horrible," he added, seeing Helen make a gesture

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of dissent and shake her head; "but the fact remains, Miss Helen, that this is an illness which makes you feel tragic, when your friends, who can't look into your mind, are wondering what there is to be tragic about."

Helen walked beside him like a child beside a big elder brother. Dr. Bowlby talked on lightly of ordinary things, and said good-bye to her at the gate-house. "You will get quite well, Miss Helen," he said, "and depend upon it, the more commonplace you can feel the better. You won't be complimented when I tell you that this is only what we call an intoxication; but unfortunately instead of making you take a rosy view of dreary things, it makes you take a dreary view of rosy things."

VIII

THE day for the return of the newly-married pair duly arrived. Helen dreaded their visit, dreaded taking up the old emotions. But Walter and Clare had been precisely warned beforehand by Mrs. Goring of the condition of things; and Helen found, to her relief, that very little was expected of her. They were evidently a much attached couple, but Clare had very little to say on the subject, except that it was nonsense to be afraid of being married, because in a fortnight you felt as if you had been married for ever and ever; and Walter was fully as forbearing. They went on to Oxford in about ten days, and soon after that, Helen made the discovery that she was undoubtedly getting better. She had bad days, when things seemed as impossible as ever; but she found her interests and powers of attention reviving; till at last a day came, quite suddenly, as Dr. Bowlby had said it would, when she suddenly realized in a flash that she was well again; and there followed a time of ecstatic delight when she felt that she had never been so happy in her life before, and when the simplest sight or sound, the smallest incident, seemed full of joyful significance.

She told her happy news to Dr. Bowlby and Mrs. Goring, but said at the same time to Dr. Bowlby that she thought she ought to find some definite sort of work to fill her mind.

"I don't feel so sure," said Dr. Bowlby. "There is a great difference between the work that flows out of a man and is really himself, and the work that people do, often

very well, merely because one must do something. If there was work of a kind that you *wanted* to do, I should say, 'by all means'; but when it is a question of *finding* work, merely because you think occupation is good for health, then I don't feel the necessity. Why not be innocently and uselessly happy for a little? You have had too much responsibility, and it came to you too early. Be idle. Read what you like, go out when and where you like. The only thing I wish you had is more companions."

"Oh, I'm only too willing to idle for a bit; and I am quite content with Mary for a companion."

"You don't want to send round circulars and affect large masses of people?" said Dr. Bowlby.

"Not at all," said Helen. "Meetings only seem to me to level people down. At a meeting you feel bound not to understand anything more than the dumbest understand, or to feel anything different from the average. At a meeting you only make the humiliating discovery that you are a human being after all."

"Yes," said Dr. Bowlby, "let us keep to the individual. You only find desolation in numbers."

"I have never yet said to you," said Helen suddenly, "how grateful I am to you, Dr. Bowlby. That day at the pool—that was my turning-point; I was feeling it to be the tragic crisis of my life, and you made me feel it was only an unpleasant and slightly absurd incident in the history of an invalid."

"I was more anxious about you than you knew," said Dr. Bowlby. "Those are the trying moments in a doctor's life, when one has to follow instinct blindfold, when one's reason is trying to interfere."

"I was so thankful that you didn't reason with me," said Helen.

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Dr. Bowlby smiled. "Why not get your father to go with you to Oxford for a few days soon, and see how the happy pair are getting on?"

This was eventually carried out; they did not go and stay with Walter. That was considered to be too great a strain on Clare's inexperience. But they found the young couple comfortably settled in a small house. It proved a time of extraordinary enjoyment for Helen. Clare said frankly that she was too busy to go about much, and was quite content to take the architecture of the place for granted. Mr. Worsley was only too ready to do the same. But Walter took Helen about in pursuit of the picturesque, and introduced her to some of his colleagues and young men. He seemed in a very happy mood, proud of Clare, and infinitely amused by her devices to appear old and wise. Helen rambled about much by herself, and found an exquisite delight in the contrast between the dignity and solemnity of the ancient haggard buildings, and the insouciant life that they sheltered. Norton, too, was sometimes her companion.

One day she ventured to ask him what he thought of the marriage.

"I will be frank," said Norton, laughing. "When I heard of it, it seemed to me the most perverse and idiotic thing in the world. Now I believe it to have been the very thing that Walter needed. His tendency was to live too much on his own rather fastidious lines, and his will is so strong towards a certain ordered monotony that he has too little change of current. Did we quite realize the strength of his will? It isn't one of those passionate, protesting, domineering wills—he always seemed so accommodating and considerate, even timid on occasions—but left to himself he quietly pursued his own course. Now

he has to deal with a perfectly new type. I don't know your sister well, but she seems to me very clear-cut; and then how lovely she is!—that is a greater power than most of us care to admit."

But Helen was herself, though she knew nothing of it, the subject of many conferences. Clare contented herself with saying that it was no wonder that Helen had been ill, when everyone about her put all the unpleasant things there were to do upon her, and took away from her all the agreeable things.

"That is rather severe, Clare," said Walter.

"I know what you are thinking," said Clare, "that now that I have arranged everything comfortably for myself, I have leisure to look round and pity other people. Well, it is the fact—and I was the worst of the lot. I behaved to her like a perfect brute."

"What do you think she needs?"

"Why, of course, she ought to marry! But she is too good for most people. Couldn't anything be done with Harry Norton?"

"He admires her very much," said Walter, "but you won't be able to shepherd him into the fold."

"He is too much pleased at thinking over all he has missed," said Clare.

"Clare, that is rather dangerous."

"I shouldn't say it to him, of course. But I will be careful, darling—I will indeed. I have found out that it is when I mean to be funny, I hurt and vex everybody. There is something vulgar about me. Did you know that great-grandpapa Worsley kept a shop?"

"It was a Stores Limited, dear child."

"Papa calls him a rugged merchant—that is only polite English for a very bad-tempered old shop-keeper."

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"What would you think about her marrying Dr. Bowlby?" asked Walter. "I suspect him of a hopeless passion."

"It would do all right. If you can get on with me, anyone can get on with anyone. But papa wouldn't like it. He is too blue-blooded."

But Mr. Worsley brought the matter up himself. He was sitting with Walter after dinner one evening, Clare and Helen having vanished.

"I am a little troubled about dear Helen," he said. "She is well now, thank God; but she was very bad for a time. She was worn to a shadow, and she was quite a changed creature. She wants more to do, more company, more interests. I am not, I hope, an exacting father, but I am a very uninteresting companion for a girl."

"Helen is devoted to you," said Walter.

"Yes, she is one of the most unselfish people I have ever known. She pardons everything. All the more reason for us to try to give her some happiness of her own."

"She should marry, no doubt," said Walter.

"Yes, but we live so quietly; we call at many houses round about, but we don't go visiting. I may tell you in strict confidence, Walter, that Dr. Bowlby once hinted to me that he was attached to Helen. I did not feel that a struggling professional man, somewhat uncouth in manner, and with no particular distinction, was at all a fitting partner—though he is my own medical attendant, and has done wonders for me. As a man, I entertain for him the highest possible respect."

"I think that is a good deal to be able to say of anyone."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Worsley. "I entertain a high respect for Mitchell, our cowman. He is a most industrious and respectable man. But I could hardly encourage him to pay his addresses to Helen."

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"But surely," said Walter, "Bowlby is a man of reasonable power and force of character, and he belongs to the same class as ourselves—the upper-middle class."

"I could not," said Mr. Worsley, "with all due respect, consider you as a member of the same social stratum as myself. It would be the height of presumption on my part to say so."

"I am inclined to think," said Walter, "that the social cleavage is now mainly an educational one."

"You surprise me," said Mr. Worsley; "do I understand you to mean that you would not think such an alliance derogatory?"

"Derogatory?" said Walter. "If Helen and Bowlby cared for each other, I should consider them both very fortunate. Helen is, I should say, one of the finest characters I know; and Bowlby is a man of an intelligence that amounts, in his own profession, almost to genius, and one of the most sterling and admirable characters that I know."

"You would consider Dr. Bowlby's status not inferior to your own?"

"I think Bowlby is worth a dozen of people like myself," said Walter. "There might be a few old-fashioned families who would turn up their nose at a country doctor. But I should no more consider such a marriage a *mésalliance* than you have considered Clare's marriage to the beggared son of a small country-gentleman a *mésalliance*."

"You have given me much to think of, Walter," said Mr. Worsley; and he spent the remainder of the evening absorbed in reverie.

IX

HELEN and Mr. Worsley had returned to the Manor from Oxford, and Helen was somewhat surprised at her father, who appeared in the best of health, having asked Dr. Bowlby to see him on the following morning. In what convolution of phrases he made his meaning clear to the doctor, could never be precisely ascertained, but Dr. Bowlby appeared at the luncheon-table in very tranquil spirits. He repeated his visit, however, so often in the course of the next month, that Helen inquired anxiously whether her father was becoming hypochondriacal. "By no means," said Dr. Bowlby. "I never admired the clearness of his judgment more; what troubles him is a small matter, about which he feels unduly nervous."

In the days that followed Dr. Bowlby seemed more free than usual from professional claims. Sometimes he walked with Helen; sometimes he persuaded her, for the sake of her own health, to motor with him while he paid a professional visit in the country. Helen enjoyed these expeditions, the slow gliding along unknown country lanes, and through strange quiet hamlets. Then she would sit in the car, happily meditating, while he paid his call. Sometimes he would tell her about the people he had been visiting, and she became aware, by many incidental comments, of his large and generous view of human beings. She was struck, too, by the hopefulness which he seemed to radiate; a farmer or a farmer's wife would come to the gate with

him, and say good-bye, gratefully to him, cheered by his quiet confidence and good sense. She said something to him about the interest of his work. "Yes," he said, "one sees a curious side of human nature thus; anxiety of this kind often breaks off a kind of crust which forms on the human spirit, and lets one see its tenderness and its simplicity and childlikeness—I don't say that the crust doesn't come back—but one has seen the eggs in the nest all right. What a shameless mixture of metaphors!"

"But what about the sick people themselves?"

"Oh, that is different; it makes them often selfish and irritable. It is a great mistake, Miss Helen, to get in the way of saying that illness comes from God. It is the work of the devil, right enough. Ill health makes villains of most of us."

"It made a villain of me!" said Helen.

"No, no—it made you over-scrupulous. When good people are well, they splash along pretty comfortably through their peccadilloes and mistakes; but when they are ill, they are horrified at the smallest spot of dirt. One ought to forget. I always think it is a sign of grace when I am too sleepy to say my prayers."

One day he asked her to walk with him. "Let us go and see the famous pool," he said.

"Oh, I don't think I could do that," said Helen.

"Why not?"

"It represents the low-water mark of my life."

"It ought to be rather encouraging. Besides, the only time when one must *make* oneself do a thing is the time when one says, 'I really can't.'"

They went together across the fields. The meadow-grass was full of flowers, and the summer wind blew idly out of the wood.

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"It seems like a scene out of the *Pilgrim's Progress*," said Dr. Bowlby, "going to pay a call on a hobgoblin."

The pool lay cool and dark among the sedge with its brown empurpled flowers and green blades.

"There doesn't seem to be much amiss," he said. "Compare yourself now, Miss Helen, with what you felt then."

Helen looked round, and her eyes filled with tears. "It is a joyful resurrection," she said. "Everything has a meaning, a beautiful secret now. But it will pass, I suppose. I must not forget that I had my chance of life, and somehow missed it. Just now that does not seem sad to me, for so much is left."

"Yes," said Dr. Bowlby, looking at her with a clear and intent gaze—"all is left, this beauty of things, and even more behind it. Do you not see your way, Helen? It is I who need you, who have sought you so long. I can give you something of the life you need, and you can give me ten thousand times more. I don't ask you for companionship or sympathy, I ask you for yourself, the greatest gift that can be given. I don't pretend to be worthy of it. If I were, it would be no gift. Helen, I have loved you ever since I first set eyes upon you—the earth you tread upon, the air you breathe. Your presence gave me courage, and when you were absent the thought of you gave me hope. I have little enough to offer you, but I dare to ask you to sacrifice yourself."

Helen stood amazed, trembling, tearful; but looking up she met his gaze; and something behind his great gentle eyes that beckoned her broke every barrier down; he held out his arms to her, and a moment later she was clasped in his embrace.

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